



**Tithe an
Oireachtais
Houses of the
Oireachtas**

TITHE AN OIREACHTAIS

An Comhchoiste um Ghnóthaí an Aontais Eorpaigh

Comhdháil Idirpharlaiminteach ar Thodhchaí an Aontais Eorpaigh

Búcairist, an Rómáin

1-2 Aibreán 2019

HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS

Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

Interparliamentary Conference on the Future of the European Union

Bucharest, Romania

1-2 April 2019

[32ENUA0025]

BACKGROUND

In February 2019, the Joint Committee received an invitation from the President of the Senate of the Parliament of Romania, Mr Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu, and the President of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of Romania, Mr Liviu Dragnea to attend an Interparliamentary Conference on the Future of the European Union on 1-2 April 2019. The Joint Committee considered the invitation at its meeting of 20 February 2019 and agreed that Deputy Bernard Durkan would attend the conference on behalf of the Joint Committee.

Deputy Durkan travelled to Bucharest to attend the conference on 31 March 2019. He was accompanied by the Policy Advisor to the Joint Committee, Stephanie Bollard.

JOINT COMMITTEE'S WORK ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE DEBATE

Participation in this interparliamentary conference was part of the Joint Committee's ongoing work on the Future of Europe debate. Following the publication of the European Commission's White Paper on the Future of Europe in March 2017, the Joint Committee published a call for submissions from the public. From September to December 2017, the Joint Committee held public sessions with representatives from a number of organisations from across Ireland.

The Joint Committee continued monitoring the Future of Europe debate in 2018. The Chairman participated in the Citizens' Dialogue on the Future of Europe in May 2018, which was organised by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in collaboration with European Movement Ireland. Senator Craughwell represented the Joint Committee at the European Parliament's Constitutional Affairs Committee's (AFCO) interparliamentary committee meeting on the State of the Future of Europe Debate in October 2018.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

1 APRIL 2019

OPENING ADDRESS

The opening address of the conference was made by **Mr Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu**, President of the Senate of Romania. In his speech, he discussed his vision for the Future of Europe. He suggested that Romania was an example of the success of European Integration, and that he

saw the EU as a community rather than just an organisation. Mr Popescu-Tăriceanu's presentation was followed by an intervention by **Mr Florian Iordache**, Vice-President of the Chamber of Deputies of Romania. He emphasised the importance of the upcoming months to the Future of the EU, referring to the European Parliament elections to be held in May 2019, and the ongoing Brexit process. He outlined the work being carried out by the Romanian Presidency on promoting CAP, cohesion policy and EU Neighbourhood policy.

The opening segment was concluded by **Ms Gabriela Crețu**, Chairperson of the European Affairs Committee of the Romania Senate. In her address, Ms Crețu focused on the need to create a long term vision for Europe, including finding solutions to increasing inequality and the rapid development of technology.

SESSION I: POLICIES OF THE FUTURE – DEBATE WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE EUROPEAN POLITICAL GROUPS

The first session was opened by **Mr Siegfried Mureșan**, representative of the European People's Party (EPP). He suggested that the EU had survived major crises over the last decade, and needed to continue to work to find solutions to ongoing issues. **Mr Victor Boștinăru**, representative of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D). Mr Boștinăru stated that unity was a fundamental value of the EU, and that pursuing exclusionary policies would only guarantee divisions.

The session was continued by **Ms Renate Weber**, representative of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). Ms Weber discussed the idea that "Europe starts at home", that the issues of citizens cannot be ignored at EU level. She outlined her opinion that identifying issues with the EU Institutions did not make one a Eurosceptic, that being pro-EU means acknowledging these issues and working to find solutions. **Mr Bas Eickhout** spoke as representative of the European Green Party, and explained that the EU was a political body which has a link to the people, and that the debate on the Future of Europe needed to encourage citizens' feeling of ownership. He emphasised the importance of taking action on climate change and rule of law to maintaining citizens' trust in the EU Institutions.

Ms Violeta Tomić, representative of the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left group (GUE-NL), argued the need for a new economic model, as she believed that increasing economic inequality was contributing to the rise of populists. She also discussed the

need to invest in policies which raise the standard of living for everyone across the EU. The session was concluded by **Mr Nicolas Bay**, representative of the Europe of Nations and Freedom group (ENF), who discussed his view that the EU should respect the diversity of Member States, stating his opposition to the idea of a federal Europe. He explained that the EU should facilitate joint responses to issues which affect all Member States such as migration and threats to external borders.

In the debate which followed the panel session, the topics of transparency in the European Institutions, cohesion and fundamental values, rule of law and security challenges were all discussed.

In his contribution to the debate, **Deputy Durkan** noted that many of the ideas proposed by the speakers had been put forward in the past and failed, and that now a new vision was needed for Europe. He emphasised the fundamental EU values of hope and cooperation.

SESSION II: SOCIETY OF THE FUTURE – CITIZENS AND VALUES IN THE ERA OF THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION.

Mr Jeroen Schokkenbroek, Director of Anti-Discrimination in the Directorate General of Democracy of the Council of Europe (CoE), opened the second session of the conference by discussing the role of the CoE in protecting human rights over the last 70 years. He explained that the CoE was monitoring the potential risks of machine learning and algorithmic decision-making on human rights, the administration of justice and the running of fair elections. He also expressed concern regarding the rise of populist and nationalist politics, stating that the CoE had observed trends of backlashes against fundamental rights and the weakening of checks on institutions.

Mr Jordan Gheorghe Bărbulescu, Professor in the Department of International Relations and European Integration of the National School of Political and Administrative Studies in Romania, discussed the need for healthy debate, dialogue and cooperation between Member States. He expressed the view that the EU would not be the same without the UK after Brexit, but he believed that without the UK the EU could be more dynamic. He emphasised the need to prioritise the social dimension of the EU, alongside economic policies and the Single Market.

Dr Michael Dauderstädt, Former Chief Economist of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, discussed income inequality within and between EU Member States. Dr Dauderstädt explained his belief

that increasing disparity between countries in Europe is a cause of migration and capital movement, and that structural measures were needed to combat rising inequality. He proposed that EU economic policy focus on demand-led growth, rather than supply-led growth. He also described some of his policy proposals, including establishing a European minimum wage and common unemployment insurance.

In the debate which followed the panel discussion, the themes of labour migration, education and the societal impacts of digitisation were all discussed.

Deputy Durkan expressed the view that rather than bringing Europe closer to the people, that the people should be brought closer to Europe. He remarked that the EU had been supportive to Ireland during the financial crash, and again during the Brexit negotiations.

SESSION III: THE ECONOMY OF THE FUTURE – IS THERE A NEED FOR A REFORM OF THE ECONOMIC MODEL?

The third session was commenced by **Mr Eugen Orlando Teodorovici**, Minister of Public Finance of Romania, who emphasised the importance of maintaining funding for beneficial policies and investments, while simultaneously formulating a new vision for the EU. He discussed the need for efficient, fair and transparent European fiscal policy, which also promotes competitiveness.

Mr Carlos Martinez Mongay, Director of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs, discussed the trends which would shape the economy of the future, including rapid technological change and globalisation, demographic challenges and the pressure on social systems, and climate change. Mr Mongay stated that the current situation was not sustainable and that economic reforms need to be implemented. He emphasised that economic policy reform should make growth more inclusive, as without the trust of citizens the EU would fracture.

Mr André Sapir, Professor at the Université libre de Bruxelles, discussed the ongoing global transformation caused by factors such as globalisation, digitalisation and demographic issues. Professor Sapir outlined how this transformation has led to a divide between those who are equipped to deal with change, and those who fear for their economic and social security. He presented the benefits of the EU's current social economic model, and argued that the Member

States and Institutions needed to work together to strengthen this model in the face of pressure from other large international economies.

In the debate which followed the speakers in this session, the topics of labour reform, reform of the Euro Area, internal migration and cohesion were discussed.

Deputy Durkan discussed the need to improve the European economic model. He also discussed the circumstances of non-performing loans, and how EU economic policies have allowed Member States to catch up economically with the US since the 1980s.

2 APRIL 2019

SESSION IV: EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD, BALKANS, EASTERN PARTNERSHIP AND EURO-ATLANTIC RELATIONS

Mr Titus Corlăţean, Member of the Romanian Senate and Former Minister for Foreign Affairs opened the final session of the conference. Mr Corlăţean discussed the importance of offering a clear European perspective to, and maintaining relationships with, candidate, potential candidate and Eastern Partnership countries. He acknowledged that it was not the best time in EU-US relations, but emphasised the importance of maintaining links in the long term.

Deputy Prime Minister of Moldova **Mr Iurie Leanca** emphasised the success of the Eastern Partnership framework in encouraging reforms through concrete deliverables, such as visa liberalisation and free trade agreements. He explained that it had been five years since Moldova had achieved its original targets, and since then it had not been offered any further progression. He warned that if Eastern Partnership countries were not offered a clear European perspective, there was a risk that incentive for reform could be lost.

Ms Tamar Khulordava, Chairperson of the European Integration Committee of the Parliament of Georgia, reported that according to a recent survey, 80% of the population of Georgia would like Georgia to join the EU and would be willing to undertake the relevant reforms. She emphasised that the peace and security of the EU neighbourhood was linked to the peace and security of the EU and the European continent as a whole.

Mr Pete Sessions, retired Republican Congressman in the US House of Representatives, stressed that the US viewed the EU positively, even though it did not always agree with the

EU's decisions and approaches. He emphasised his country's support for the economic development in the EU neighbourhood, particularly post-soviet countries.

Mr Kristian Vigenin, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds of the Parliament of Bulgaria, argued that the perspectives of candidate, potential candidate and Eastern Partnership countries should be taken into account when discussing the future of Europe. He emphasised that the Eastern Partnership should be focused on clear concrete deliverables, and suggested that a membership perspective should be offered to countries which deliver on these targets.

Mr Arman Yeghoyan, Chair of the Standing Committee of European Integration of the Parliament of Armenia, discussed Armenia's recent political developments. Mr Yeghoyan explained that since the Armenian "velvet revolution" in 2018, there had been significant reform momentum and renewed focus on deepening the country's relationship with the EU. He stated that the impetus for reform in Armenia has been internal, but requested assistance from the EU and US in implementing reforms and developing economically.

In the debate that followed the panel session, suggestions for improving and maintaining the EU Enlargement process and the Eastern Partnership framework were discussed, as was the importance of maintaining the security of the union.

Deputy Durkan argued that in order to prevent discontent and instability, it was important to consider aspiring members of the EU as equal partners. He lamented the European and global instability caused by Brexit and trade disputes.

FINAL REMARKS AND COMMON DECLARATION

In their closing remarks, **Ms Gabriela Crețu**, **Mr Angel Tîlvăr** and **Mr Titus Corlățean** concluded that the conference has served as a platform for views and information, and was part of the long-term reflection on the Future of Europe.

The Romanian Parliament proposed the adoption of a Common Declaration of the Interparliamentary conference on the Future of the EU, entitled "*Declaration – Towards a stronger, more cohesive, inclusive and relevant European Union on the global scene*", to serve as input for the informal European Council Summit on the Future of Europe to be held in Sibiu, Romania on 9 May 2019.

The Joint Committee on European Union Affairs considered the draft of the Common Declaration, which was circulated in advance by the Special Joint Committee of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate for the coordination of the parliamentary activities in the framework of the parliamentary dimension of the Romanian Presidency of the Council, on 20 March 2019.

The Joint Committee agreed that the sentiment of the Common Declaration would be best included in the COSAC conclusions process. As the format of this suggested approach was unusual, several Parliaments suggested that another approach be taken.

CONCLUSIONS

The Joint Committee discussed the proceedings of this interparliamentary conference at its meeting of 3 April 2019. The Joint Committee agreed that it was a worthwhile conference to attend, and that the proceedings will contribute to two of the Joint Committee's ongoing work streams; the Future of Europe debate and EU Enlargement Policy. 2019 will be a decisive year for the Future of Europe, and for the Enlargement agenda, both of which the Joint Committee will continue to monitor closely.



Michael Healy-Rae TD,

Chairman of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

15 May 2019

APPENDIX ONE: PROGRAMME OF THE CONFERENCE