

Institute of International and EU Affairs- Future of the EU 27 Programme

Good Afternoon, Chairman and Members of the Committee.

When the Brexit referendum delivered the result that the UK wished to leave the EU- the Institute of International and European Affairs, (IIEA) , with the Department of Foreign Affairs, looked to the future of the EU 27. Much time and thought has been devoted to Brexit but the Institute has also given considerable attention to the future of the EU and to Ireland's place in it.

The Future of the EU 27 is a three year project which the IIEA has undertaken with the Dept of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The objective is to contribute to the debate about the future of Europe within the group of 27 member states, by providing in -depth analysis of emerging trends in order to gain insight into the major challenges facing Ireland and the EU. It is also an exercise in listening to Irish people – their views of the EU, how they wish the EU to develop, what issues are of concern and of interest to people.

As we face the challenges of the future for the EU there are a number of factors that can guide us here in any post Brexit situation

Firstly , the most recent poll in May of this year showed an approval rating of 93% support for EU membership in Ireland . This has grown steadily and is now at its highest ever.

Secondly, Brexit has had the effect of exposing very clearly and in a very raw and sharp focus what the UK is losing. The Brexit debate, covered very extensively in Ireland has had the positive side effect of providing more detailed information on the EU than might otherwise be effective. This is a significant support to the Government in engaging with the strategic agenda of the EU and to the Institute in the roll- out of the various programmes in this regard.

The IIEA, in drawing up the programme for the future of the EU, has been conscious of the need for Ireland to play its part in support of the European project as a whole . In this context we are conscious that we must invest considerable resources in strategic cooperation with the other 26 member states.

Elements of the Future of the EU27 Programme

In cooperation with the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Institute has undertaken a wide ranging programme with a number of elements.

- 1) Research papers : The Institute produced its own research papers on the Future of the EU institutions after Brexit , the State of the Enlargement Agenda, the EU Social Agenda, the EU Security and Defence agenda and a number in the economic area.
- 2) A wide range of events, open to the public, have been held in the Institute with invited speakers from home and abroad, including European foreign and Finance Ministers, MEPs, politicians , diplomats, EU commission officials, academics and think tank members. The objective of these meetings is to inform the Irish audience of the views from other member states on the topics which are of significant interest in the discussions underway, not just in the EU but of relevance internationally and which influence the EU in its interaction on the global stage.
- 3) Regional events. A series of regional events have been held in towns and cities throughout the country- in Galway, Waterford, Cork, Limerick , Dundalk, and Sligo . Each had a different theme- the event in Sligo in May 2019 was on Climate Change and the Future of Agriculture. The Limerick one in February 2019 focused on “How should the EU spend your money”? with a particular focus on the EU budget. Each event involved a panel of politicians and experts on the respective topics. These meeting were very successful with very good engagement with the public.
- 4) “Emerging Voices” Anthology

The IIEA Emerging Voices Group is a pivotal component in the Future of the EU 27 Project which brings an extra dimension and fresh perspective to the work of the IIEA. The Group was established in 2017 and the purpose of this initiative was to convene a group of emerging leaders from a diverse range of professional and social backgrounds, taking account of gender balance. The group met on a monthly basis to share their vision of Ireland’s place in the EU and to further their understanding of European affairs. A collection of papers written by 18 members of the group reflecting an interrogative approach to EU affairs and proposing forward looking recommendations was launched in an

anthology publication by Minister for State Helen McEntee TD last week on 4th June. Examples of the topics are; Citizens Engagement in Europe; Citizen Access to the European Court of Justice; The case for a European Mortgage Market; EU counter-terrorism policy; Re-imagining the African Continental Free Trade Agreement and 12 others.

- 5) A Series of 11 so-called “Explainers”. These are a series of short fact sheets providing answers to common questions about EU affairs and providing insight into what goes on inside the EU. Examples include: What’s in a Name - The Macedonian Name Question; Why does the EU need 27 Commissioners?; How does the EU plan to spend your money?; Changing the Guard -What are the key upcoming changes in Brussels? What is next for EU enlargement?; Where does the EU stand on security and defence policy?

Eleven have been produced and four more are in preparation.

- 6) The IIEA is also producing a series of podcasts due to be released very shortly on a two weekly basis. These will deal with broad themes such as EU Institutional Affairs, Populism, Migration, Transatlantic Relations, The elections to the European Parliament.

The Institute has also held podcast interviews with a series of visiting speakers e.g. Philip Lamberts – Green Perspective on the Future of Europe, Emily Mansfield on Franco –German Relations, Dr Dmitri Trenin on Russia and Europe, Dr Constanze Stelzenmueller on Transatlantic Relations in the age of Trump, and Dr Rosa Balfour on: “ Is Europe facing a democratic recession.

German Irish Joint Forum

Last year, and again in May of this year, the German and Irish Foreign Ministries, together with the prestigious German think tank , the Stiftung Wissenschaft and Politik and the Institute joined together for a seminar over two days (hosted by the IIEA this year) . On the agenda were German Irish bilateral relations, the EU strategic agenda and transatlantic relations. This was in line with the range of German–Irish proposals agreed last year with the objective of creating a closer relationship between the two countries. The Forum is held on alternate

years in Berlin or in Dublin and has now been established as an annual event.

Lastly, we have the very significant Country Profiles programme as outlined earlier.

Looking forward towards the next phase, we will be developing ,with the Dept of Foreign Affairs and Trade, a programme focussing on the implementation of the commitments agreed by the Heads of State and Government at their meeting in Sibiu in Romania as brought forward in the form of a Strategic Agenda to be adopted by the Leaders at their meeting on 20/21 June. This will set the overarching priorities that will guide the work of the EU over the next 5 years.

The IIEA will continue the work of assisting the Government in shaping its policies in the implementation of the Strategic Agenda and in contributing towards a well-informed debate on the EU issues and challenges on the domestic front.

Marie Cross
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