

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM GHNÓTHAÍ AN AONTAIS EORPAIGH

JOINT COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN UNION AFFAIRS

Dé Céadaoin, 3 Aibreán 2019

Wednesday, 3 April 2019

The Joint Committee met at 2 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan,	Senator Paul Coghlan,
Deputy Seán Haughey,	Senator Gerard P. Craughwell,
Deputy Mattie McGrath,	Senator Terry Leyden,
Deputy Frank O'Rourke,	Senator Neale Richmond.

DEPUTY MICHAEL HEALY-RAE IN THE CHAIR.

Alliance Building to Strengthen the EU: Dr. Catherine Day

Chairman: I remind members to ensure their mobile phones are switched off. This is important as they cause interference for our broadcasting, editorial and sound staff.

Today we will have engagement on alliance building to strengthen the European Union. I am very glad that Dr. Catherine Day is here to discuss this. She is well known to all of us as the former most senior European civil servant and currently serves in a number of roles, including as a special adviser to President Juncker. It is important that the EU is prepared for the future and for a future without the UK in it. We must look ahead and think about how strong relationships can be built between EU states and how Ireland can best contribute to this. Of course, alliances can go beyond governments working together. This is something on which many of us can work together in different spheres.

Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

By virtue of section 17(2)(f) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of the evidence they are about to give to the committee. If they are directed to cease giving evidence on a particular subject and they continue to do so, they are only entitled thereafter to qualified privilege in respect of the evidence they give. They are directed that only evidence concerned with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against an entity or a person either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I invite Dr. Day to make her opening statement and I am sure committee members will have questions and comments for her. It is an honour to have her here. As I have told her, her CV precedes her and she is known for her extremely strong work ethic, something I really admire in anybody. It is a privilege to chair a meeting at which she is attending.

Dr. Catherine Day: I thank the Chairman and members of the committee for inviting me to address them today on the topic of alliance building. This has always been an important part of how the EU works and it takes on a particular relevance in the context of Brexit. I commend the Chairman and the committee on their very timely initiative in considering this important topic.

We all know the EU will be very different after Brexit. I will mention a few areas because they are the background to the focus on alliance building. Inevitably, the EU will be more continental in outlook after the UK leaves. Among other things, it will mean that the civil law tradition, which is the basis of most continental law making, will be more dominant than when the UK, with its common law tradition, played a big role.

France and Germany will obviously play a bigger role in shaping the future direction of the EU. They will no longer have to contend with the questioning and reluctant attitude of the UK. In thinking about today, it struck me that the EU was already working before the UK and Ireland joined, but Ireland has never known the EU without the UK. It will be quite a change for us. We often saw issues in a similar way to the UK and we will certainly miss the role the UK played as a big member state in being a buffer between France and Germany and in terms of organising a different debate.

More than ever, in the future the euro will be the core of the EU system and further consolidation and deepening can certainly be expected.

Without the opposition of the UK, and this may be one of the positive sides of UK departure, the EU will develop stronger social policies. This will certainly be needed to address the challenge of populism and the feeling among parts of the EU population that they somehow have missed out on the benefits of globalisation and that they have been left behind by open trade. The EU needs to be able to show that it cares about all of its citizens and that stronger economic policies will be accompanied by social policies that deliver.

I have a couple of worries about how the EU will be in the future. I am concerned that the EU 27 could be more protectionist than at present and perhaps a little less open to the outside world. In my view, the current push to curb the competition rules and develop European champions is not a healthy development.

I also have a worry that what is called in Brussels the “better regulation” agenda process, which has improved EU policymaking through evidence-based, impact-assessed policy proposals resulting from wide stakeholder consultation will be given less importance without the constant pressure of the UK to combat red tape. These are merely a few of the changes that we can expect to see in the future.

For me, that means that the post-Brexit climate will require a different approach to Irish membership in the future. We have all seen during the Brexit negotiations just how deeply integrated we are as a Union and how much we benefit from things that we take for granted but that only exist because of our EU membership. Perhaps, most of all, we have seen the need to keep our citizens involved and help them feel that EU belongs to them and is not something imposed from the outside.

In my brief opening remarks, there are four areas on which I will focus: the need for much deeper understanding of the wishes and problems of other member states so that Ireland can build alliances with like-minded countries but also so that we understand the opinions and the positions of those who will differ from us; the enhanced need to anticipate what proposals are likely to come from the institutions and other member states and to seek to influence them at an early stage; the need for earlier work with others on proposals we want or do not want to see agreed; and finally, the need for continuous information to our citizens on how and why the EU is changing and Ireland’s place and role within that future Union.

First, on the topic of the deeper understanding of the views of others, there is a need for a systematic approach. The EU is now so big through successive enlargements that it is impossible to keep up to speed with thinking in every member state unless one has an active information gathering and exchange system in place. While new technologies have made it much easier for us to keep in touch with people around the world directly, do we know whether they represent a considered national or sectoral position or are they are merely transmitting their own personal views to us? With the ease of contact, there are pluses and minuses.

In Ireland, we attach importance to personal contacts, but so do our EU counterparts. Building relations over time, based on a deeper understanding of their point of view, is crucial to building good alliances. In my time as Secretary General, I noticed a strong tendency to form groups of so-called “like-minded” member states. There are long established such groups, for example, the *Francophonie* of the French-speaking countries, the organisation of the Benelux countries, as well as newer ones, such as the Visegrad countries in eastern Europe and the

so-called “New Hansa League”, but it is important that we not only speak to those who are like-minded but also reach out to those who hold different views from us. The EU is all about finding workable compromises that allow it to move forward in the interest of all its members and reaching out to those with different views is just as crucial a part of the engagement as is talking to those who would agree with us.

We are all conscious of the huge solidarity that Ireland has had from the other EU countries and the EU institutions throughout the Brexit process. In my view, this has been achieved by the mobilisation of politicians and diplomats with our other partners with a clear message from Ireland, with a clear investment in time and travelling to meet partners, who, in turn, have been willing to take a serious interest in the case that we put. We will need to keep up that kind of effort in future. We have to reach out beyond the English-speaking world to our continental partners and that means travelling to them and keeping in touch on a regular basis, obviously, not only when we have a problem. It will mean a requirement for more staff increases, not only in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade but across all Departments that are dealing with EU matters. It will also require a bigger travel budget so that politicians and officials can regularly visit different countries as part of building deeper alliances. Thinking about this, it came to me that, in fact, what we need is something close to the mobilisation that Ireland engages in every time we hold the Presidency of the EU. Then we really gear up and we have similar messages across all messengers. Ireland has a good track record of successful Presidencies.

The good news is that all of the smaller member states are coming to the same conclusion. They all see what we see - the need to work together permanently to ensure that the voice of smaller member states is heard. This is certainly, but not only, a task for Government. The Oireachtas can do useful work with other national parliaments and social partners and civil society, all of which have a role to play in building long-term alliances.

I want to mention two organisations that I know of which, I believe, can play an incredibly useful role in supporting this process. I am on the board of both of them because I regard that membership as a *pro bono* part of my continuation of public service. I refer to European Movement Ireland, EMI, and the Institute for International and European Affairs, IIEA. Both organisations are well known to members of this committee and with their connections in other member states and in their different roles, both can play a significant role in helping to inform Ireland about changing EU priorities and in helping to formulate wise national responses. The point I would like to raise here is that both of those organisations have to spend a lot of time and resources on fundraising every year. They are grateful for the public funding they get but it would be important to find ways to support them that allows them to devote themselves to the challenges of the tasks that lie ahead instead of merely being engaged in a constant quest for project funding. I hope that may be something about which the committee could have a think.

Having spent most of my working in the European Commission, I want to say that alliance building should not only be confined to other member states but that I see a similar need to invest in the European institutions. We have all seen the role that the Commission has played over the past two years in standing shoulder to shoulder with Ireland through the Brexit negotiations and in general the Commission sees itself, and should be seen, as a true friend of the smaller member states. My generation of Irish EU staff is retiring, however, and our numbers are falling. We need to encourage young people to think about a career in the European institutions and maybe also to take more active measures to support them when they make that choice. Without in any way interfering with the independence of Irish EU staff, they can be an important source of information and guidance on what is happening across the institutions.

My second point is about anticipating what will be coming down the track from Brussels and elsewhere. There will be less legislation in the future because the EU has a well-developed body of legislation in many areas and what is needed now is to keep it relevant and up to date, not necessarily to add to it. However, all the time there will be new challenges where co-ordinated action at EU level will be more effective than unco-ordinated national action. In response to this change of need, the Commission has been developing an overall set of policy proposals for each of its five year mandates. This year, 2019, is going to be an absolutely crucial year in that respect. Ireland is following closely and feeding into the meeting that the Heads of State and Government will have in Romania on 9 May to talk about the future direction of the EU 27. Just after the European Parliament elections, most likely in June, the new President of the European Commission will be nominated. The European Parliament will then vote in July on confirmation of that President on the basis of what he or she sets out as programme priorities. The parliament will certainly seek through its systems and committees to influence that programme of work. When the parliament holds hearings with the nominated Commissioners, it will also be seeking to feed into the future work programme of the Commission for the next five years. Similarly, in the European Council, Ministers will also be wanting to feed into that programme. This is really a crucial year in terms of influencing and deciding the future direction of EU policy. Of course, that policy will not be set in stone. The next five years will bring new crises, coupled with the need to adapt and so forth but the basic backbone of the EU agenda for the next five years will be set before the end of this year. I really hope that civil servants and stakeholders are getting ready to feed in their ideas and to react to those that are advocated by their counterparts in other member states.

In terms of influencing future proposals, the Commission nowadays spends a lot of time consulting with and involving stakeholders long before it makes proposals. Unfortunately, many stakeholders, including member states at times, do not get involved early enough in the process and then have to scramble at the last minute to try to develop their positions and have them taken into account. We in Ireland would benefit from early discussion of upcoming proposals not just across Government but also across stakeholders. This would give a lot of opportunities to feed a really mature and well developed Irish perspective into the work being done with opposite numbers in other member states to develop like-minded positions. If Government and stakeholders can work together, at least on the key proposals, that will have the effect of ensuring a wider public understanding of how the EU works and how Ireland can have a role in shaping and influencing it.

This leads me to a very important point about the need for continuous citizen involvement. I am well placed to know just how badly the EU has suffered from bad press as a remote and soulless technocracy. In particular, the British Eurosceptic press has had a lot to do with that. It has used ridicule to try to undermine what is very solid and praiseworthy progress in a lot of areas. Here in Ireland we have seen a strong desire, expressed through our many referenda campaigns and in other ways, among people to understand and be part of what is happening in the EU. We have also seen, in the context of Brexit, what can happen when people feel alienated from that process. While we may be enjoying a kind of Brexit dividend at the moment in terms of Irish support for the EU, we all know that it is very hard to maintain the intensity of interest and that level of focus in more normal times. Therefore, we need to think about how we can have a step change in how information circulates on the EU and on creating a greater sense of civil involvement. It is possible to make a complex and technical organisation like the EU accessible to citizens if we take the time and invest the necessary resources. We have examples like the Citizens' Assembly, the all-island civic dialogue on Brexit and the Government's future of Europe citizen's dialogue national engagement process which show what can

be done. What we need is some kind of permanent programme of citizen involvement, not just on issues but on an ongoing basis. I have already mentioned European Movement Ireland and the Institute of International and European Affairs, IIEA, both of which have an important role to play. More frequent debates in the Oireachtas on EU policies would also be helpful and there are examples in other member states that are worth examining. This committee might like to consider whether there could be more regular reporting on the floor of the Dáil on significant EU meetings and issues as they develop. We need to find ways to stimulate a real debate in the media and to move away from the kind of polarisation and politicisation that has too often been how EU differences of opinion are portrayed. The first step would be to agree that we need a deeper and more inclusive debate and then I am sure there would be a lot of good ideas about how to make it happen. I do not think there is necessarily a need to develop a new body to do it but rather to use the existing structures to inject a deeper EU dimension into many of the ongoing processes already in place.

We all know that the EU post-Brexit is going to be different. The issue is how to prepare to get the best out of the next stage of our own membership of the EU and alliance building is clearly going to be a very important component of that. There are member states with which we have a lot of common and it will be easy to team up with them but there are also those who have very different views. We have a natural advantage because we are not in any one geographic or political grouping so we can move easily between different groups, depending on our interests. I have already explained why we need to have a concept of alliance building that includes the domestic arena and not just building alliances with other countries and institutions. The most important alliance of all has to be with our own citizens because they need to feel that they are involved and that their voice is heard. We have seen through the different referendum campaigns that we need a more sustained level of communication and information to maintain the high level of support for the EU in this country.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to appear today. I wish members success in their deliberations and look forward to seeing the results of their labour. If I can be of any help now or in the future, the committee should not hesitate to involve me.

Chairman: I thank Dr. Day for her very comprehensive overview. Senator Neale Richmond has indicated.

Senator Neale Richmond: I also thank Dr. Day for her very comprehensive presentation. While I do not want to turn this room into an echo chamber by agreeing with Dr. Day, it must be said that I do agree with pretty much everything she said. I will make a number of points in response to her remarks and then ask a few questions.

One of the areas that is very much lacking is the level of parliamentary and inter-parliamentary engagement. Some of us are lucky to get the opportunity every six months to travel to the COSAC meetings but outside of that arena there are limited opportunities for domestic politicians, both Deputies and Senators, as distinct from MEPs, to engage. The introduction of direct elections and the abolition of the dual mandate for the European Parliament means that MEPs meet as members of the European Parliament, which is great but domestic parliamentarians do not engage very much with their European counterparts. I am talking here about engaging on a sectoral basis. Rather than just having COSAC meetings every six months, there should be an agricultural, finance or justice version, bringing all those committees together and shadowing the relevant European Council meetings. I was fortunate to spend just over two years on the Committee of the Regions and one of the best elements of that work was that we were dealing with domestic politicians and making comparisons in terms of what works. That was subsidiar-

ity in action in terms of taking European policies to the member states.

I agree with Dr. Day about the need for increasing the presence of Irish diplomats across Europe, particularly within our permanent representation in Brussels. It was a real shame that we reduced the numbers after the 2013 Presidency and then had to build those numbers back up. That said, we have many excellent people over there, which has been very evident over the last two and a half years. We really need to expand our key embassies. One of the greatest achievements during the crisis years was keeping all the embassies open but we now need to increase embassy staff numbers and the numbers of people from State agencies like Enterprise Ireland and Bord Bia who are based in Europe. There is also a need for additional consular outreach. We need to augment our embassies as well as our existing consular network. I am thinking in particular of the consulate in Edinburgh, the recently reopened consulate in Cardiff as well as the planned consulate for northern England which will open within the next 12 months. There is another consulate coming on stream in Germany and there is talk of opening one in southern France but there is significant scope for expansion across the EU, particularly in the context of European cities that are similar in size to Irish cities.

Dr. Day made reference to her generation of Irish European officials and said that we are losing so many good people. I know they are not being replaced and there will be a huge gap there. One of the reasons I left Brussels in 2007 was that Dublin was a lot more attractive to come back to than it was 25 years ago. Something that puts off a lot of people is the scare of the concours and of admission into the institutions themselves. We see a lot of people working in the private sector in Brussels or in agency-related work who are unwilling to go into the Commission. It is not money or conditions that turns them off, it is the linguistics. Much emphasis is rightly put on the status of the Irish language but I have fears about the number of people in the institutions who will have a command of English as a first language after Brexit. Increasingly, we see English as the working language of the EU whereas previously it was French. Can anything be done in terms of a derogation to prioritise native English speakers in a European context, possibly by giving them exemptions in the concours or preferential status? There are only so many Maltese and Irish citizens. Many of the British European officials over the past 15 or 20 years were on secondment from Departments as opposed to coming through the direct admission system. There needs to be a level of flexibility that possibly has not been there before.

There are two aspects of citizens' engagement that are critical. The European Commission is brilliant at informing the people on how they can complain about the EU and, unfortunately, this allows many of the myths to continue, particularly in the tabloid media. If we have to read one more article about blue passports and straight bananas we will all go a bit mad but it does resonate. Perhaps we need to be a little more abrasive and counter the myths. Perhaps the European Commission or, to be honest, domestic politicians, need to be a bit more direct in championing all the good that Europe has done over the past more than 60 years. I am not just talking about mobile phone roaming but the really deep things that my generation take for granted. We can go all the way back to peace if we want. The European Commission and the European institutions as a whole could be a lot more aggressive in selling the narrative and taking on the absolute ridiculousness that is presented.

With regard to engagement, a concept alien to this country but perhaps not to others is the spitzenkandidat. It worked well at the previous European elections. I am happily contributing to the campaign of Manfred Weber for these European elections. It is not a system that we, in Ireland, necessarily appreciate because we do not use the list system. I am sure it would require

direct treaty change but potentially we could directly elect the Commission President, with confines such as guaranteeing nomination by a political group or a mass number of European citizens. People would have to go into the voting booth and put a No. 1 or an X beside their choice of candidate rather than it being indirect. We do not have the list system in this country and no one knows that Manfred Weber will be the top of the Fine Gael list on 24 May. It would probably mean voters would get half a dozen ballot papers this time, given the other elections that will be happening and the referendum being held on the same day, but we need to familiarise ourselves with it. It might also force political groups to narrow it down to one candidate. This is a challenge I put to my colleagues.

These are a few ideas and suggestions on which I would love to get the opinion of Dr. Day. I have more specific questions on the nature of alliances. Dr. Day touched on some of these. How best can we approach these natural alliances? Is it in a sectoral manner? We know Ireland and France have always worked hand in glove when it comes to agricultural policy and the CAP. Would it be an ideological approach when it comes to monetary policy, now that Ireland sees itself far more as northern European? Dr. Day spoke about the New Hanseatic League. Is it geographic? The UK was our closest neighbour and it was obvious to link up with it beyond policy but it will not be there so it really does fall on us to increase our engagement with the Benelux countries and possibly some of the others that are simply closer to home.

Dr. Day mentioned at length the smaller member states. How can we prioritise what policy we can identify with? The policies of Luxembourg differ drastically from those of Estonia. Does she mean any smaller state? With which smaller state should we identify and in which areas? We do not need to be rigid. Just because we are an ally of one country on one issue does not mean we cannot be an ally of another country on another issue. The most important alliance I believe, and it is a political alliance as much as anything else, is the alliance against euroscepticism and how best can we come together and take on the populists on the hard left and the hard right, some of whom are in governments. This is the biggest challenge. The most important alliance is bringing together countries, be they part of the European movement for more than 60 years or since 2013, and state we want this peace process and movement to continue. How do we build this alliance and solidify it? Unfortunately, for too long we have probably taken that alliance for granted and I say this against domestic politicians. It has been too easy for too long to blame Brussels. We need to take responsibility for our own actions. We need to triumph initiatives and ideas that come from a European level and we need to give them the level of support and credit they deserve. Equally, we cannot simply use the perceived foreign bogeyman as somehow being responsible for all our ills. Of all alliances, this is the most important to build up. I would welcome Dr. Day's opinions on this.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I welcome Dr. Day to the meeting. I have no doubt that the role she continues to play will bear good fruit in the future as it has in the past. I happened to be at a meeting in Bucharest for the past two days at which the same subject matter was up for debate. I have been attending meetings for a long time in Europe. I have been doing it for almost 40 years, when I think of it. The same questions come around again and again with regard to bringing Europe closer to the people. The phrase is wrong. It should be the other way round, along the lines that Senator Richmond has been speaking about. The people and we, as representatives of the people, need to familiarise ourselves more with what affects our colleagues in other countries throughout Europe. Unfortunately, what Britain did was that it stood aloof from Europe. In the days of Henry Plumb, for example, it was different but since then the critique has gone on without cessation and there has been constant criticism. Constant dripping wears a stone, and it did. Let us not forget that Nigel Farage and such people were elected for this

purpose and became the lightning rod for debate in the area, to the extent they dominated the debate whenever it took place, which was regularly.

We had presentations of this nature at the meeting on the future of Europe I attended in recent days with extremes of right and left. I was reminded of a similar meeting I attended in Berlin a few years ago when the order paper asked "Where is social Europe?". This was at the very beginning of the economic crash. Nobody seemed to understand that when times got really bad other distractions arose and leaders throughout Europe had to attend to the issues that were of the most serious domestic importance and they did so, largely with beneficial effect. Again, sadly, Britain took the opportunity to criticise at that particular time and much of the media in the UK was dedicated to a constant critique of where Europe was and how it was going to fail. We seem to have forgotten in recent years that the prediction was the euro was about to fail and disintegrate and the reasons for it came largely from the media in the UK and they were not all tabloid.

I am sure that at various meetings we have all had to listen to a tirade of how poor we were and how much poorer we were going to get as a result of being members of the European Union. We need to take ownership. We have done this better than most other countries but every member of the European Union needs to take ownership of the Union. If they do not do so they will move apart and populism will win out. It is hugely important the elected public representatives throughout Europe, in domestic politics and in the European Parliament, take on the critics and those offering the easy options. Let us not forget this is not the first time populism invaded Europe. This is not the first time by a long shot. Those who say it can never happen again are wrong. These things have happened again. Man's inhumanity to man knows no bounds when it comes to repetition. We need to be conscious of that and of the fact that we can do something about it. My feeling, based on the discussions over the past couple of days, is that we need to be alert. We need to speak. Without doing it aggressively, we need to dissect the arguments put forward by people pursuing a populist stance and prove to them by reason that they are wrong, and the extremes on both sides are wrong.

The alliances are most important. That is the way to do it. It is part of the natural progression of getting to know the other people better. I entirely agree with Senator Richmond that the national politicians need to get to know each other. How else do all of us here understand the issues that affect other people? There are deep worrying issues affecting every country in the European Union, as they do in every country all over the world. It is up to ourselves to be familiar with and sympathetic towards them, and if we do not find ourselves in agreement with them that at least we understand them and can do something about it in that way.

I hope that we do not disintegrate towards a world trade war. There were a few hints at it in the past few days. There is a danger that we could descend into a tit-for-tat situation. We had to explain yesterday to some people that trade agreements are not the gift of one group, one country or one philosophy. They are reached by agreement. The late Peter Sutherland spent considerable time negotiating the GATT many years ago. A feeling seems to be developing that the most powerful should dictate the pace and that, by so doing, they will achieve a situation that they could not achieve by agreement through natural discussion and dialogue. That is a worrying factor, and it is particularly worrying for smaller countries. In the aggression that takes place in trade wars, the smaller countries get damaged first and hit hardest, and the protagonists unfortunately damage each other to the extent that the fallout is the same again in so far as the smaller countries are concerned.

I am a little concerned about the drop-off in the Civil Service involvement in Brussels. That

is something we should directly address. That should be addressed in the educational system and through the diplomatic services here. It should be done as a matter of urgency. We need to educate people for those positions in Brussels in all organisations that we Europeans converge on for whatever reason.

Europe is going through a hiatus at present. Questions are being raised in a number of member states, which we would regard unreasonable because all the alternatives put forward have been tried previously and failed. What is it with people sometimes that we must go back and have the same debate, often in trying circumstances, despite the fact that there is strong evidence to show that they failed previously? We can go back centuries and find the same thing. Europe has its own heritage in that area. We need not go back beyond the 20th century to find out all that we could do wrong and the depths to which we could go to inflict the maximum punishment on each other with death and destruction in all directions. For any generation, and particularly the present generation, of politicians from whichever side to forget that is a sad reflection on society.

I thank Dr. Day for the work that she continues to do in that area, and particularly for flagging for us what was happening before it happened. I believe greatly in the maxim that to be able to avert a crisis before it becomes recognised as a crisis is a greater art than trying to deal with it when the place is in flames.

Deputy Seán Haughey: I thank Dr. Day for her comprehensive presentation and for setting out a number of practical suggestions on how we can operate and improve matters generally from an Irish point of view. I recall her speaking at the AGM of the European Movement Ireland at the height of the Brexit crisis, which we are still in, where she expressed concerns about Ireland taking its eye off the ball regarding a number of other developments taking place in Europe, such as the future of Europe, the multi-annual financial framework, MFF, and migration. Does she still hold those concerns? She set out the agenda, but does she think that Brexit has completely taken over our public administration system and does she hold concerns about all these other development which are proceeding?

President Macron has set out his vision for Europe and we do not agree with everything that he has said. He is to be congratulated for producing a thought-provoking vision of the future of Europe. States can be divided into three categories: nation states, which do not want to make any more changes, and the view of which is that one should pull up the ladder and what we have we hold: other nation states, which believe in incremental change on a pragmatic basis in the interests of citizens, in which camp, I suggest, Ireland is; and a third category, which believes in deeper integration of the European Union. I am not sure that Irish people are fully convinced about the need for deeper integration. We have seen that in our referendums. Any case for deeper integration will have to be clearly put before them and the rationale for it explained, and there would have to be a lot of public debate. How does Dr. Day see the movement across the nation states? Is there an inexorable move towards deeper integration or will it be stalled and will there be difficulty realising President Macron's vision?

The UK leaving the EU poses a major challenge for us. For all sorts of reasons, the UK was an ally on various issues. Alliances now will have to be formed again on these issues, including farm support, tax, security and defence, and social policies. Dr. Day set out some guidelines on that. How are we doing in this regard? Are we engaged in that process? As I stated earlier, our public administration system is convulsed by the fallout from Brexit. Are we doing well in forging new alliances or does much work need to be done? I agree with the two previous speakers that the big alliance will be an alliance against populism and we know where we stand

in that regard.

I have one final question. In one way, it is an innocent question. We have a view that the Irish people are popular, everybody loves us and we punch above our weight. We have good interpersonal skills, to which Dr. Day made reference in her presentations, and diplomatic skills, and our public servants are excellent in respect of diplomacy, etc., but how are we considered generally in the European Commission and across the nation states? She has much experience. We were a bold child in 2008 when our banks collapsed and we needed a bailout and we are certainly causing problems at present regarding the Border, etc. I suppose it is a light-hearted question. How are we viewed generally in the European Union?

Chairman: Before I make a few comments, I will explain that Senators Craughwell and Coghlan and Deputy O'Rourke were here but had to leave. It is not disrespectful; it is merely that the Seanad was resuming and they had to attend.

I welcome Ms Noelle O'Connell, the director of European Movement Ireland, the ambassadors and many others in the Public Gallery. I particularly welcome another important group of people from the greater Beaufort area just outside of Killarney, which, of course, everybody knows is the tourism capital of the world and the finest place in the nation that anybody could be from. I thank Dr. Day for attending the committee. She discussed her view that the Oireachtas has a further role to play in alliance building. Are there any ways that she feels this committee could contribute to this?

The committee regularly meets stakeholders. On Tuesday mornings, for example, I meet ambassadors from all over Europe, as well as with other officials. I relay the contents of those meetings to the committee members. I believe building alliances, friendships and relationships is what politics is all about. As we discussed earlier, if our neighbours across the water were as good at talking at length as we are, they might not have found themselves in their present mess.

We have to mind our backs because of what is happening over there. We deal with visiting parliamentary delegations. Are there any other ways we could further use our platform to build alliances with other member states, as well as with our citizens, to create positivity about Europe? As Dr. Day knows from her important position, there seems to be a negative attitude towards Europe. When something goes wrong, it is deemed to be the fault of those politicians in Europe. Can we turn that around, especially in light of seeing what our neighbours across the water have done by backing themselves into a corner? Can we use that in some way to shore ourselves up?

The EU 26 has expressed strong support for Ireland and our position in the Brexit negotiations, often demonstrating a deep understanding of Ireland and its challenges. Does Dr. Day believe there are opportunities to build upon this wave of support? Much of the work on alliance building has been focused on government level and established diplomatic channels. We are interested in expanding this and looking at the important role parliamentarians can play in alliance building. The committee participates in COSAC, the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union, and other interparliamentary groupings which are valuable fora for networking with parliamentarians from other EU member states. We meet stakeholders and visiting delegations. Our committee members are proactive and workmanlike in their job. Will Dr. Day recommend how we can further develop our existing interparliamentary networks?

Is there a risk that focusing on alliances between individual member states could contribute

to perceived divisions within the EU, such as geographical divisions or divisions between established and newer member states? Is this an opportunity to move away from this? Alliances start with understanding. Are there any particular member states which Dr. Day believes Ireland could understand better? Does she see us falling down in our role in any of this?

Most think of alliances as only those between countries. However, we are interested in how understandings and co-operation can be better developed between other stakeholders, such as trade unions, farming organisations and various interest groups. Does Dr. Day believe these organisations, working with their European peers, can contribute to improved knowledge? All politicians, whether they are county councillors, Senators or Deputies, know of the valuable contribution that the likes of, for example, the IFA, the ICMSA, the Irish Hotels Federation and others working in the tourism sector make. Councillors, Senators and Deputies have built up expertise from years of work, traipsing up and down the country going to meetings, listening to the people involved in farming or tourism about their issues and concerns.

Local and European elections will be held in May. I have no agenda in promoting or not promoting political parties. I do not care from what party people person comes, provided they are good workers. That is all I am interested in. They can be Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, Independent or Sinn Féin. If they are workers, I am behind them. If they are not, it does not matter what stamp they have on their back because they are no good in my book. Either one is a worker or one is not. Can we use our MEPs more? I see a lack of connectivity between our MEPs. It is no disrespect to them as individuals. I do not mean to say anything disparaging about them. Citizens, irrespective of whether they vote, think of MEPs as being away over in Europe, having nothing to do with them. They do, however, have much to do with us. Dr. Day, more than anyone else in this room, knows that because of her impressive work history. Can we create a greater engagement not just between Members and MEPs but between the citizens? It is the citizens who are the bosses and who we must represent. After the May elections, I hope there will be greater engagement at ground level and people would be able to see something from their politicians in Europe.

Dr. Catherine Day: Members have raised an array of interesting points.

On the question of how do we push back against the tide of populism and maintain a feeling across the European population that Europe is a plus and takes nothing away from them nationally but gives extras, I do not believe that battle can be fought and won by the Brussels machinery alone. What are missing are the national voices in support of what is going on. It is important to distinguish between the overall architecture and the individual decisions we do not like. In modern society, we have a tendency to conflate the two and claim the EU is useless and no good because of one matter or issue we do not like.

During the euro crisis, because of my role, I was in meetings with the Heads of Government. I watched them sometimes go through 24 hour long meetings, wrestling with the euro problems. It left me with the strong conviction that, in the end, with the exception of the UK, they all want the EU to succeed and will take the hard decisions when they absolutely have to. No matter how differently they approach matters, they all know all of our European countries are small in the modern world and we have no hope of influencing the wider world if we do not act as a grouping. They all want a different kind of EU but want it to succeed. That is a good starting point.

In some ways, we are still digesting the 2004 enlargement. In a way, each of those countries which joined then felt it would be the 16th member state while the rest of the EU felt we would

go on as before. We are still working out how a much larger EU with different traditions and expectations has to find its way. We are going through quite a challenge, both from older and newer member states, to our values. It is not unique to geography. Having seen them in dire times, my conviction is that they all have a reason to want it to survive.

Greece, for example, is still going through a difficult time. It has not wanted to leave the euro or the EU because it understands its future would be even more difficult without all that membership brings. The challenge is for national politicians to talk about the EU in more positive terms, but not to be starry-eyed and claim it is all wonderful. They need to give a more mature assessment to people emphasising that 27, 26 or ten others need to be brought on board. It is important that small countries are represented and at the table and have a say. There are reasons that we agree to the things we do.

Legally, qualified majority voting is the norm in all legislation but the EU very rarely pushes things to a vote. It may take another six months or a year to bring the reluctant on board continuing trying to find compromises because there is more inclusivity but also better implementation if everybody has signed up to whatever has been decided. It is only really *in extremis* when everything has broken down and there is a need to make a decision that issues are pushed to a vote. I do not mean the voting process needs to be explained every day, but there needs to be a sharing of responsibility for taking decisions at EU level.

In my time as Secretary General, I was really frustrated when the European Council spent all night drafting its conclusions and then 28 Prime Ministers gave different press conferences on what had just happened instead of spending 24 hours drafting the conclusions and stating, "This is what we agreed", without the need to put a national spin on it. Wrongly, in my view, a number of national politicians of all different parties feel somehow that they have to come out of these meetings and say something different or say how they had to fight for a national point of view instead of saying they had collectively come to a conclusion they believe will be good for all of us because everybody had their fingerprints on it. That is one aspect.

That is not to say that Brussels cannot do a better job; it can. It can do many things to improve the situation. If it is always an outside voice trying to argue the merits of the EU, it has lost in advance. It has to be the members. It is like any club; the members have to want it to succeed. My conviction is that they do but we will still have much debate over a long time to come to hammer out where we want to go next. Some of that will not be comfortable for Ireland because we will not have the same harmony of views as we had with the UK on many things - not on everything, but on many things.

We need to pay careful attention to the trade situation. The member is absolutely right in saying we are coming to a stage where some people believe might is right and that the biggest can call the shots. That is the kind of denial of the multilateral world from which we have benefited considerably in the past 70 years. In this area Europe must hold to its views and try to bring together many other countries in the world that think like us. The recent EU-Japan trade deal is a very good example of other big trading blocs in the world that believe in the rule of law, negotiated agreements and the mutual interest that can be negotiated. We need to find those alliances and build them.

The EU has been behind in social policy, not only but largely because of British opposition to developing social policies. There has to be a better way for those who gain from globalisation and open trade to share more of the benefits with those who inevitably will lose or feel penalised by it. That is a big challenge for Europe in the years to come. If we do not get that

right, we will retreat in the face of pressure from the United States, China, etc. We will also retreat into a less open way of doing business. This will not be good for the smaller countries that make their living from it.

I am concerned about the number of new Irish officials in the institutions. I know the competitions are difficult, but as Senator Richmond stated, many young Irish people working in Brussels in consultancy companies, advocacy organisations, etc., would love to work for the institutions. However, I do not believe it is right to seek a language derogation. The British have argued for that for years, but it goes down extremely badly with the other countries from where many people have to learn more than one other language in order to be able to work in a multilingual environment. However, some help could be given in that area. There are examples of helping people who are going through the process to improve their language skills. That would not cost very much and would be a better way. It is very important for people to show they have made an effort to learn another language in order to understand and reach out to a different culture. That kind of thing is well regarded in the rest of the European Union. We need to be alive to encouraging younger people and helping them deal with the machinery involved.

How are we doing on new alliances? Many of the smaller countries are going through the same thinking process as Ireland to work out how they can group together to be more effective. I think there is a welcome for Ireland in many of these groupings, but we will need to do more to understand their problems and positions. We may need to give them more support in areas in which we might have had little interest in the past. I always tell the story of one of my Luxembourg colleagues who, even though his country is not located near the sea, was a specialist in the Common Fisheries Policy. When asked why he bothered, he would say, "It is because it is important to my other colleagues. I want to be able to brief my Ministers and tell them how we think it should go but also how to help them." It will require more effort on our part.

We tend to be very pragmatic. There is a more visionary dimension to how other countries see the EU. We might need to get more lyrical in understanding the less pragmatic side of things. We are always viewed as being well prepared and I think we would be welcome. We and the other small member states will need to work harder together to replace the expertise the UK brought to many sectoral forums. Their analysis was always very well prepared. They had always thought ahead of the consequences. They played an important role in questioning and improving proposals. We will all miss that expertise. Alliances can be formed by sharing out that work among not always exclusively the member smaller states, but certainly with the smaller member states.

The role of visits is very important. A number of national parliamentary delegations have come here and have gone to the Border. They wanted to see for themselves and having seen for themselves, they became important allies in the overall building of support for Ireland. We could selectively do a bit more of that, going to visit places or attend meetings that are important to other states. That really builds a well of goodwill and understanding that we will need in the future.

I want to speak about the dangers of overspecialisation on sectors. It is natural that the people who know most about technology, agriculture or whatever will club together. While that sharing of experience is very important, it is also important for somebody to have an overview. For example, this committee is one place that has the overview. When things do not get sorted out and they start to go up the political agenda of the European Union, a kind of hierarchy applies and there is only political space to deal with a certain number of issues. It is very important in every system that we have an accurate readout of the relative weight of different

things. I am thinking of the debates to come on the future budget of the EU which will need to be decided fairly quickly once the new European Parliament and Commission are in place. Every country will have its own set of priorities. Somehow each country needs to have somebody who is watching the gradual filtering down of the issues to the top three or four that will be decided by the European Council. While it is important to have a like-on-like sectoral view, it is also important to have an overview and to keep a national track of that.

There is a risk of geographic division but if we have visiting rights, so to speak, to all of the different groups, we would be a welcome party if we make an effort to participate from time to time. Ours is not the agenda of a big country and we will not always be pushing a particular line. We will have our views but we mainly want things to work. As a country, we could avoid falling into the trap of being seen as only part of a certain group.

There is, inevitably, some truth in the idea of Brexit eclipsing all other issues for the moment. It is the major issue for Ireland. The risk of a no-deal Brexit has demanded an enormous amount of energy and it is the top priority. The need for that focus will lessen at some stage and, hopefully, in positive circumstances. We will then have to come back to the big issues on the European agenda, including the future budget, obviously, but also migration. We will have to find a European policy to deal with that. One could also mention many other issues and this is why it is important that there has been dialogue on the EU after Brexit. It is difficult to get people to really concentrate on that at the moment but at least the topic is there. Work is being done on the issue across Government and many stakeholder organisations and that can be ramped up when there is a bit more political space and time for it. It is important.

Turning to the issue of how we can address negativity, we need to do more to debunk the myths surrounding the EU but that is not an easy thing to do. The UK media in particular have developed ridicule into a fine art and that is most damaging. We can see the way Nigel Farage always gets a laugh in the European Parliament, even from people who do not agree with him. It is devastating. We have to work harder to try to explain the EU and one way to do that is to involve the stakeholders more. When I speak to representative groups, no matter who they are or what they represent, I am struck by the fact that their knowledge of their sectors across Europe is usually quite high. That is because those groups are all linked into European networks. It is also the case, however, that the groups in question tend to be quite narrow in their specialisations. We need to graft this overview of where the European Union as a whole is going onto that specialisation.

We may also at times need to return to the simpler issue of why it matters that the EU works. We all feel very European when we go outside of the EU. We look back in and then we see what it is that makes us different from the rest of the world. We have to try and channel that feeling and explain to people that Europe stands for certain values we have benefited from and that we hold very dear. Part of the debate taking place at present involves a battle for the place of values and what are the fundamental values at the foundation of the European Union to which everybody needs to adhere.

For all those reasons, we are going to have to invest more time and energy in reaching out to the other member states and trying to understand their different vantage points. We do not feel the same security pressures, for example, that some other countries do because of our history and geography. We tend, therefore, to be less open to that argument for wanting the EU to succeed. The Baltic states, for example, joined the euro not only for economic reasons but also because they understood that it is at the core of the EU, which is where they want to be for security reasons. We need to find ways to engage with that motivation even though it is not

our primary concern and security is quite low on our list of priorities. I suggest that kind of approach. It would be useful for parliamentarians to reach out to groups of countries rather than to try to cover everybody at the same time. It would make sense to target different groups over a certain time cycle. In addition to COSAC meetings, it would also be useful to meet smaller groups of parliamentarians from the point of view of sometimes just listening but also of having them listen to us and seeing where alliances can be made.

There is much useful work going on in different countries about how to involve citizens. Some of this has been documented and there are very innovative ways of trying to make this huge process relevant to different citizens. We have experimented in this country with some forms of citizen involvement. They have shown that people are willing to take the time to be involved if expertise and time is provided to help them formulate and think through their ideas. If we have that citizen involvement, we can try to overcome the alienation of parts of society across Europe and try to develop a new understanding of what the value of the European Union is for the coming 20 or 30 years. Each generation has to create its own definition of the EU.

I sympathise with Deputy Durkan who asked why we have to keep fighting the same battles all the time. We have to do that because there is always a new generation of public representatives, lobbyists, etc. They will always try their hand at stating that something is old hat and attempt to debunk it because there are so many interests at stake. We have to not only repeat and explain why things are as they are but to also be open to change where it is good. However, we should not necessarily change principles if we have tried and tested them and they are solid. We need to bring people around to understanding why certain things are as they are. I do, however, understand the fatigue of having to constantly repeat the battles.

One thing we do need to explain better to our citizens everywhere is just how much of the EU is built on compromise. In some parts of the world, compromise is seen as a weakness and almost as a dirty word, whereas in Europe we see it as a strength. It is about understanding different points of view and finding an accommodation. We all know that in our own lives so we need to bring that home to people and explain not everything is not black and white. It is about finding common ground in between. Everybody will not get everything they want but everybody has to get enough of what they want to bring everybody along. That subtlety has been lost in our polarised world. I know I have not covered every point made by members but perhaps I could pause there.

Chairman: It was an overview but I think we have covered everything. We appreciate Dr. Day taking the time to attend. We are going to suspend to allow her to withdraw.

Sitting suspended at 3.18 p.m. and resumed at 3.24 p.m.

Chairman: We are resuming in public session but going straight into private session. Is that agreed? Agreed.

The joint committee went into private session at 3.25 p.m. and adjourned at 3.30 p.m. until 2 p.m. on Wednesday, 17 April 2019.