

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM GHNÓTHAÍ AN AONTAIS EORPAIGH

JOINT COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN UNION AFFAIRS

Dé Céadaoin, 12 Meitheamh 2019

Wednesday, 12 June 2019

The Joint Committee met at 2 p.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

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

Teachta / Deputy Michael Healy-Rae sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

12 JUNE 2019

Alliance Building to Strengthen the European Union (Resumed): Institute of International and European Affairs

Chairman: Apologies have been received from Deputy Cullinane. I remind members to ensure their mobile phones are switched off. I am glad we are having an engagement with the Institute of International and European Affairs, IIEA, on the building of alliances to strengthen the EU. I am delighted to welcome Ms Jill Donoghue, who is the IIEA's director of research; and Ms Marie Cross, who is a member of the IIEA board and chairperson of its "future of EU 27" group. Most of us will be familiar with the work of the IIEA, which is Ireland's leading think tank on European and international affairs. The IIEA has been doing some excellent work recently in looking to the future of Europe.

As we all know, in our discussions on Brexit we have been trying to deal with the issues in the various sectors while concentrating on the future of Europe. We know what things were like in the past. We know what the structures were. Gigantic changes lie ahead as a result of Brexit. It is imperative that we all work to ensure a great deal of thought, work and deliberation is put into the future of Europe. I understand that Ms Donoghue and Ms Cross have been mapping countries' profiles in their EU explorer. I know they have dedicated a lot of work to the future of the EU and we appreciate that very much.

I would like to remind everyone of the rules with regard to privilege. 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 outside the Houses or an official by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. By virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to this committee. If they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are only entitled thereafter to qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence concerned with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given. They are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I ask Ms Donoghue and Ms Cross to make their opening statements on behalf of the IIEA. I am sure the members of the committee will be glad to hear what they have to say and will have questions and comments for them afterwards. I thank them again for being here.

Ms Jill Donoghue: I thank the Chairman and the members of the joint committee for inviting us to explore the issue of alliance building in the EU post Brexit. We are aware of the Chairman's deep interest in and commitment to European affairs. We would like to compliment him on his participation in the Europe Day debate with the Minister of State, Deputy McEntee, and others at the Royal Hospital on 9 May last. It is an honour to be invited to address the members of this committee, some of whom I have had the privilege to meet over the years. In this short presentation, I will outline the context in which the IIEA's work on the future of the EU 27 project is situated. I will then briefly explore how the concept of alliances has changed, as a background to the work which the IIEA has conducted in mapping possible future alliances for Ireland in the EU. I will briefly refer to the country profiles which the institute developed for this purpose as part of a project on the EU 27 post Brexit and I will conclude with a few remarks on existing and potential alliances for Ireland. My colleague, Marie Cross, former ambassador and chair of our EU 27 project, will give an overview of how the institute engaged with Irish citizens in the course of the EU 27 project by hosting public events both at the IIEA in Dublin

and in rural venues nationwide, and its online outreach strategy via podcasts and explainers, and by convening a group of young professionals, called “emerging voices”, whose publication we have brought with us today.

Across all of these elements of the project, the institute has sought to amplify the voices and concerns of citizens young and old, urban and rural, and to bring European voices to both the institute and the regional venues in order to broaden citizens’ understanding of the priorities and concerns of other member states and to listen to their priorities. I acknowledge the key role played by the Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy McEntee, in the citizens dialogue process, in which we and European Movement Ireland, EMI, were participants, and I thank the Deputies and MEPs who were very gracious when approached to participate at our regional events.

This is a strategic moment for the EU. Its institutions are in a period of transition and the five key appointments which will be decided at the European Council on 20 and 21 June next are eagerly awaited. We are on the cusp of the Finnish Presidency, which will have to oversee the Brexit process and the multi-annual financial framework, MFF, negotiations. However, the defining event in terms of the future of the EU was the UK referendum in 2016 that led to widespread reflection on the future of the EU 27 post Brexit. This commenced with discussions in Bratislava and Rome, came to fruition at the Sibiu summit in Romania on 9 May last and the culmination of this process will be the EU strategic agenda for the period 2019 to 2024, which will be decided at the summit in Brussels later this month. One overriding conclusion from this process was the need to create new alliances between member states post Brexit. This is particularly the case for smaller states like Ireland which, in the absence of the UK, will need the support of other smaller states, or alliances with larger member states, in order to exercise influence in the EU in the future and to have its voice heard at the EU table.

Although alliances are traditionally understood as fixed associations between countries with a common goal, a new interpretation of alliances envisages bilateral relationships that involve flexibility, as well as long-term co-operation towards common strategic goals. Alliances can also be used as a foreign policy tool to advance national interests towards a common goal. Ireland, like other member states, should seek to influence the EU’s strategic agenda for the next five years and to shape EU policy according to its policy preferences at an early stage. To achieve this it will have to turn its attention to a review of its already existing alliances, consolidating its partnership with like-minded member states, and exploring the possibility of creating new alliances with other members of the EU post Brexit, including countries with which we do not share the same perspective on every issue. In a speech to the IIEA in May, Mairead McGuinness, MEP, argued that it is not sufficient to put on the green jersey in the EP and promote one’s national interests in an overt manner. Instead, it is important to develop a broader understanding of the views and perspectives of others in order to proactively develop Ireland’s influence in the EU by offering genuine support for the priorities of other member states when required.

Developing connections with our partners in the EU 27 is not limited to official government relationships. It also involves engagement with civil society, think tanks and universities, to get a deeper and more informed understanding of local issues in other member states. To this end, the IIEA engaged in a mapping exercise to identify relevant ideas from think-tank analyses in other member states and speeches by Ministers and MEPs from partner countries for the purposes of better mutual understanding of policy positions across the EU 27.

As part of a three-year project on the future of EU 27 post Brexit, supported by the Depart-

ment of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the IIEA developed a series of country profiles on the 26 EU member states, set out in the form of a map of Europe that is accessible on the IIEA website. This interactive web tool, EU Explorer: Mapping the Future of Europe, allows the user to hover over a particular country and to search the overall profile of a given member state, or focus on a particular policy profile within a member state. Each country profile commences with a short overview of the political complexion of the member state and its vision for the future of the EU 27 post Brexit, and each one concludes with an exploration of pre-existing informal or formal alliances of that member state.

It was too large a task to look at all policy areas but as part of the initial pilot project programme, we investigated issues such as the budget, economic and monetary union, EMU, taxation, defence, digital policy, justice and home affairs, agriculture, social affairs and trade policy. The objective of developing the country profiles was to build an understanding of the wide variety of views and policy positions across the EU and to examine the potential for alliances with other member states based on convergent or divergent strategic goals. Using a traffic-light colour system, the explorer highlights areas of divergence from Irish policy positions in red, and areas of possible alignment or existing convergence between Ireland and a given member state in green. The country profiles can be found at <https://www.iiea.com/eu-explorer/> and are updated at the end of each month.

One advantage of the explorer is that it provides information that has not previously been available to policy makers or the wider public in an accessible visual mode. A somewhat similar exercise was carried out by a sister think-tank, the European Council on Foreign Relations, ECFR, and its EU Coalition Explorer, which adopted a different methodology from that of the IIEA to identify the preferences, influence, partners and policies of member states and their potential for future coalition building in the EU. One of the important conclusions of that study was that Ireland needs to select its strategic partners with care, prioritising those who already offer a broad network of contacts and relationships. While the ECFR explorer seems to imply that countries on the periphery, such as Finland, Portugal or Ireland, have more difficulty in engaging in successful networking, I contend that Ireland's position as a psychological insider in the core of the EU since its accession, coupled with the practice of diplomacy and networking by the Irish foreign service and by Irish business, citizens and officials, as well as parliamentarians in COSAC, is second to none.

It is interesting that the Government's approach to alliances seems to have moved from *ad hoc*, issue-based alliances to strategic partnerships with like-minded countries. An example of such a new alliance is the so-called Hansa group, which includes the Nordic Baltic states plus two, that is, Ireland and the Netherlands. This group shares a liberal economic view of trade and financial matters with a focus on growth and innovation. In the absence of the UK, such a coalition of states is necessary in order to have a voice at negotiations. The IIEA, by the way, is organising a public seminar in the autumn of 2019 in tandem with all the ambassadors of the Nordic and Baltic countries and with the support of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to develop a broader understanding of our mutual interests.

Portugal is another small member state which, like Ireland, has a long-established relationship with the UK and is seeking to realign itself post Brexit. As an Atlantic country, Portugal shares Ireland's interest in maritime issues and transatlantic relations, and has a common interest in Africa. Similarly, Ireland is actively involved the wider group of 17 on Single Market issues. Traditional alliances such as the Franco-German alliance will, however, continue to play a significant role in determining the future of the EU. It is important for Ireland to con-

tinue to maintain a strong link to both France and Germany and to invest in deepening these relationships. Traditionally, the relationship with France has been based on a common interest in the CAP, while the relationship with Germany focused mainly on financial services matters. Nowadays, there is an appetite to take co-operation to new fields, such as digital co-operation where France, for example, is playing a leading role in artificial intelligence and where Ireland is establishing its digital credentials as part of the digital forerunners group. The institute is working closely with the French and German embassies in Dublin and the German ambassador in Dublin, H.E. Deike Potzel, has invited some of our emerging voices and our young professionals network to visit Berlin on a study trip in the autumn. We have also organised a conference with the French Embassy on climate change to explore commonalities of interest in that area.

The IIEA's motto is "sharing ideas, shaping policy". The institute is grateful to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for its support for this EU 27 project which, among other things, examines how Ireland can play a leading role in certain policy portfolios, forming new alliances and aligning itself with like-minded countries, and shaping the future of the EU for the next five years. The EU strategic agenda will provide the outline and framework, but the challenge will be to fill it with ideas that will represent the vision and voices of our Government, our Parliament and our citizens.

Ms Marie Cross: Ms Donoghue has covered many of the areas and I will simply add some details of the projects in which we are engaged. When the Brexit referendum delivered the result that the UK wished to leave the EU, the IIEA, together 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 Department 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, to 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. First, the most recent poll in May of this year showed an approval rating of 93% support for EU membership in Ireland, which has increased steadily and is now at its highest ever. Second, 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 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 co-operation with the other 26 member states. Co-operation with the larger member states is important, particularly in the case of the Franco-German alliance but co-operation among smaller members gives support and validation to the larger member states and the EU as a whole.

There are a number of elements of the future of the EU 27 programme. The first was a series of research papers produced by the Commission, which laid out the policies in various areas

such as the eurozone, security and defence, the EU budget, social policy and globalisation. The institute researched these areas and provided recommendations to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. It also produces 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. 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, European 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 under way, not just in the EU but internationally, and which influence the EU in its interaction on the global stage.

We have also organised regional events and there have been six in towns and cities throughout the country - Galway, Waterford, Cork, Limerick, Dundalk, and Sligo. Each had a different theme. For example, the event in Sligo in May 2019 was on climate change and the future of agriculture. The Limerick event in February 2019 focused on how the EU spent the people's money, with a particular focus on the EU budget. Each event involved a panel of politicians and experts on the respective topics. These meetings were successful with very good engagement with the public.

A new and exciting development for the institute is the "emerging voices" anthology. The 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 the 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 the Minister for State, Deputy Helen McEntee, last week on 4 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 counterterrorism policy; and re-imagining the African continental free trade agreement, and there are 12 others. We have also produced 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 why the EU needs 27 Commissioner; how the EU plans to spend people's money; the key upcoming changes in Brussels; what is next for EU enlargement; and where the EU stands on security and defence policy. Eleven have been produced and four more are in preparation.

The IIEA is also producing a series of podcasts, due to be released shortly on a two-weekly basis. These will deal with broad themes such as EU institutional affairs, populism, migration, transatlantic relations, and the elections to the European Parliament. The purpose of the podcasts is to attract a wider, younger audience who receive information and analysis in an audio rather than a written form. The younger researchers in our institute have informed us that this is a popular way for young people to access information about the European Union. The institute has also held podcast interviews with a series of visiting speakers, including Philippe Lamberts on the green perspective on the future of Europe, the Russian speaker, Dr. Dmitri Trenin, on Russia and Europe, and Dr Constanze Stelzenmüller on transatlantic relations in the age of Trump. Other themes included Franco-German relations and the question, "Is Europe facing a democratic recession?"

The German Irish joint forum mentioned by Ms Donoghue is a very interesting initiative and project in the overall development of Irish-German policy. Last year, and again in May of this year, the German and Irish foreign ministries, together with the prestigious German think tank, the Foundation for Science and Politics, and the institute joined together for a seminar over two days. It was hosted this year by the Institute of International and European Affairs. On the agenda were German-Irish bilateral relations, the EU strategic agenda and transatlantic relations. This was in line with the objective of creating a closer relationship between the two countries.

As Ms Donoghue has outlined, we have a very significant country profiles programme which has been very popular with the number of people have accessed it at home and abroad.

Looking forward towards the next phase to be developed with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, we will work on a programme focusing on the implementation of the commitments agreed by the Heads of State and Government at their meeting in Sibiu in Romania. These will be brought forward in the strategic agenda to be adopted by the leaders at their meeting on 20 and 21 June, which will set the overarching priorities that will guide the work of the EU over the next five 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.

Chairman: I thank Ms Cross for her valuable and informative contribution.

Senator Neale Richmond: I thank both speakers for the contributions, particularly for the copy of the emerging voices anthology. I happen to know a couple of the authors but I look forward to reading the contributions of all the authors, most of whom are relatively active on Twitter.

There are a number of areas that I wish to touch on based on the remarks of the speakers and other remarks we have heard in this series of engagements. I will be happy for either of our speakers to respond in due course. Both have spoken about the very strong relationship and of the events held by the IIEA with German partners recently. What other strategic partners does the institute have? What work does it do on a European level with similar foundations and think tanks? It is important that engagement involves every sector of society and is not only on a member state level.

Ms Donoghue mentioned Ireland's role as a psychological insider and the very strong work of our diplomatic corps in Brussels in recent years, as did Ms Cross, and our strength at permanent representation, ministerial and Council level. Ms Donoghue also mentioned the COSAC. Beyond COSAC, what can we as parliamentarians do to strengthen the reputation of Ireland at that level and build those alliances? What EU and other fora can we engage with to build that alliance? Does COSAC meet often enough? I mentioned that we meet every six months, which is great, in the country that holds the Presidency and the Chairman attends a different meeting. Where is the opportunity for national parliamentarians to meet to discuss European issues? Members of the European Union discuss issues at a European level and are not members of their national parliaments. What about parliamentarians? Where is the grand intra-European agrifood committee or home affairs committee to mirror the European Council? Is that something that could be developed or can we improve?

I have identified, although I am open to correction on this, three major issues other than Brexit facing the EU over the next five years. It is very hard to look beyond Brexit, particu-

larly in this country, and our approach to these issues might be determined by what happens in respect of Brexit at Hallowe'en and subsequently. The issues I have identified, which may be considered more important in other countries than here, are migration, the future of the European budget, particularly the CAP, and the climate emergency. Who are Ireland's key allies on all three of those issues? On CAP, the obvious relationship, as was noted, is with France. On migration, we are a little isolated because it does not necessarily impact on us as immediately as it does on other member states such as Greece and other southern Mediterranean countries. My queries are on those three key areas. I thank the speakers again for their presentations and the ongoing work on the bevy of reports they produce. I try my best to read as many as possible.

Deputy Seán Haughey: I think the IIEA for its presentation today and the ongoing work it is doing on the European Union. I have attended many of its events in North Great George's Street, which are always very interesting and produce lively discussion among its members. It is interesting to listen to the scientific approach of our speakers to alliance building. This is a subject the committee has given some attention to since the Brexit referendum in the UK. The scientific approach to this issue is an interesting perspective and one which we will consider further.

I was delighted when Miss Donoghue stated that the practice of Irish diplomacy and networking by the Irish foreign service is worthy of note. We can be very proud of our diplomats at European Union level in advancing our interests and those of the European Union. We have had the national statement on the future of Europe, which was debated in the Dáil just before Easter. This will feed into the strategic agenda later this month at the European Council meeting.

I have two questions in addition to my main contribution which is to thank our guests for the work they doing. On the question of personal relationships, particularly at European Council level, what weight would our guests give to relationships at that level, namely, between Heads of State and Government when they meet and the friendships that build up? Do our guests believe they are critical, slightly important or something else, apart from all the other work that is being done?

Ms Donoghue also mentioned the Franco-German alliance. That is central to the EU and we all watch it very carefully. It occurs to me that if the Taoiseach of the day, regardless of who it is, has a good relationship with the German Chancellor or French President, it is always in Ireland's interest. How important are personal relationships at European Council level?

In the experience of our guests, do they consider that Ireland is looked upon as something of a bold child, as it were, within the European Union, having regard to our banking crisis, the bailout and so forth? Are we considered problematic as to the Northern Ireland backstop and Border situation? We have been taking up a great deal of the EU's attention. We punch above our weight and are well respected but do some of our allies or colleagues consider us as problematic from time to time because of these various issues?

Deputy Bernard Durkan took the Chair.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I am in an awkward position because I was thinking about what I would say when I was sitting opposite as a committee member. Perhaps our guests will forgive me if I continue with those thoughts because I wanted, like everybody else, to thank them for being with us today and to welcome their presentations.

It goes without saying that the formation of alliances and friendship groups is more important now within the European Union than it was at the beginning of European integration. I will continue on the theme of my colleague, Deputy Seán Haughey, on which I take a contrary position. We are not so much a bold child, but we are seen as a child who might have a problem within the association of which we have become members and whose problem might become the Union's problem at a later stage if not attended to. It is very important that we learn from this and that we use our position strategically to intone the importance of forming alliances and listening to each other. We can have alliances with bigger countries and smaller countries to our advantage and to theirs - in our case to learn where they are coming from, where they are going and what their interests are, and at the same time for them to learn from us and for us to learn from them.

This phrase "bringing Europe closer to the people" has become a theme across Europe. I have always held the view that we have to bring the people closer to Europe. If the people of Europe do not have a commitment to the European strategy, it is a waste of time. We can bring them as close as we like; it will not make any difference. The opinion polls in this country indicate the people are closer to Europe because the people have now focused on Europe in a way that we have not had to do since our membership began. When looking at Europe we see it as part of us as opposed to the reverse. I do not want to be critical of our good friends and colleagues across the water in the UK. However, in many situations that have emerged over the years they have adopted the opposite approach: that the European system should become more in line with what they have themselves.

In contrast to that, way back when Ireland aligned itself to the German monetary system as opposed to sterling, that was an important move. It brought us into the centre of Europe and made us aware of the kind of territory in which we had to operate. It also made them aware of a smaller country. It was a very important exercise and that needs to continue.

If we were considering the future without the dialogue among smaller countries and between smaller countries and bigger countries, we would make a grave mistake. I have had, as we all have had, interaction with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, which did a great service to what was needed at that time. Various EU member states can move on to a different challenge, to meet the new challenge as it comes, and deal with it in a way that we have not had to do before, ensuring that Europe and the European project remain on-stream because if it does not and one block is dislodged from that European brickwork one at a time, then the Europe as originally intended will cease to be.

I am saddened to hear from time to time expressions to the effect that people want their freedom from Europe. They should reconsider what that means. In recent weeks one person when interviewed on television said of the modern Europe that since the end of the Second World War, we have had the longest period of peace in the history of Europe. That is his greatest thing to say, but it says it all. It says it all that the European project was the best, most important and single biggest peace project worldwide in the history of the globe. That is something we need to bear in mind in the future.

There is an obvious need for dialogue between all countries at the moment, which is a good thing. It is good to make ourselves understood and to be understood. By the same token as we proceed into the next phase of the Brexit era, we need to recognise that we have a story to tell and we wish to hear the story of others.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I apologise to the witnesses; during their presentation I

was involved in legislation in the Senate and I do not have time to go into great detail here.

One of the documents before me is entitled *The Specific Character of Ireland's Security and Defence Policy*. Reflections on neutrality is mentioned. One of the great challenges for us relates directly to our defence policy. We no longer fight wars on land in the way we once did, but Europe is at war - the Continent, the European Union, is at war. It is at war in the cyberworld. The most vicious criminals are working all day, every day to engage in cyberattacks on the European Union and every financial institution and any other institutions one cares to think of.

In that context Ireland needs to move its strategic defence policy into that era. We have security elements within the country. I believe we need to set aside this notion that Ireland is a neutral country; we were never neutral. We were militarily non-aligned and that is all we ever were. The notion that neutrality is in some way challenged by involving ourselves in something as important as PESCO needs to be challenged. It is only with the might of the combined 27 and the economic might that will bring that we will be able to find the funding required to challenge the modern-day war of cybersecurity. If we are to do anything, we need to identify precisely where Ireland is from a defence perspective. We then need to invest.

I believe we should have a director of cybersecurity encompassing a slightly broader definition than just cybersecurity because there are other areas. Ireland's economy hosts approximately 40% of the world's soft balance sheets, representing an enormous amount in this country. However, this money is footloose and could move rapidly if there is a challenge. That rapid movement has the capacity to break the country and destroy our economy in a short time. We should set aside this notion of Irish neutrality and instead start talking about Ireland's alliance in the war in the cyberworld.

We are not talking about putting troops on the ground or some notion of a European army at some stage in the future. However, very soon Ireland will be contributing €280 million to the PESCO project comprising approximately €13 billion. Through the money we will put in, we will have the capacity and the intelligence in the academic institutions in this country that are capable of providing the research and leading the world in cybersecurity. This is something we should try to promote.

However, this needs an explanation to our citizens who have been told for so long that Ireland is a neutral country. We can hardly say we were neutral when we provided the weather forecast for D-Day. We can hardly say we were neutral when we provided safe flight paths over Donegal into Northern Ireland. We can hardly say we were neutral when we allowed those who landed in the country from sunken ships or whatever to quietly walk back across the Border. Let us get away from the nonsense of neutrality and talk about the real challenge from the world of cyberspace and everything associated with it.

Today is the first day I have publicly spoken on this, but I am becoming extremely concerned about it. Unless we have a director of cybersecurity under the command of the military, reporting directly to the Taoiseach, we will not be at the races when it comes to exploiting the advantages that will arise from PESCO. I would look for a co-ordinated group or seconded group of academics under the control of a senior military officer. Having a senior military officer at the front gives great confidence in the event of an attack when one sees someone in uniform coming out and speaking on it. We need to bring together academics and the business world, both the financial business world and the producers of goods. We need to bring them all in under an umbrella group where they are managed and working together to source funding to develop better security systems in the area of software. We need to have an immediate response

system in place in the event of an attack. In the world we live in today, there are attacks all day every day.

I taught information technology for 25 years. I worked mainly on the hardware side but I worked to some degree on Microsoft certified professional and Computing Technology Industry Association, professional certification. At the time we spoke about hardware chasing software because hardware was developing at a slower rate. We now have a situation whereby software and negative software are developing at a rate far faster than we can keep pace with. We need to put the resources in place. I think I have said enough on the matter. I am really sorry I did not get the full presentation from the Institute of International and European Affairs representatives. This place is rather busy at the moment.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Thank you, Senator Craughwell. You got enough of the presentation and you made a good input yourself.

One thing that has come up in the context of dialogue today is climate change. It is the issue in vogue at the moment. We have to understand that in the dialogue we cannot expect Italy, France and Germany to close down their motor manufacturing industries or engineering sectors. Likewise, we should not be expected to close down our agrifood sector to comply, but there are other ways and means of doing it. We have to understand the age within which we must operate and do so effectively, as must our colleagues throughout Europe. With all of that I will hand over to Ms Donoghue to respond.

Ms Jill Donoghue: Thank you, Chairman, and I thank the committee members for their responses. It is becoming a lively and interesting discussion.

Reference was made to our partnerships with other think tanks. This is something close to my heart. I am now 20 years at the institute and I have been trying to develop links over the years. We have three groups of partnerships. We are members of an organisation called Trans European Policy Studies Association, TEPSA, which organises meetings twice per year before the assumption of the EU Council Presidency between sister institutes of international and European affairs throughout the EU. We are also involved with foundations as such as the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, the respective conservative and social democrat foundations, as well as the Green Party's Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung in Germany. These relationships go back over many years. We have hosted joint conferences with these foundations and sometimes with their support.

Many of my researchers write for some of the think tanks in the context of TEPSA. We have written a joint book with the institute in Croatia. We have a former director of the Institut français des relations internationales, IFRI, the French think tank, who has been writing blogs and a long analytical paper for us on populism. The final group is made up of think tanks outside of the TEPSA network such as Chatham House, the Centre for European Reform and the Federal Trust in London, as well as many others that are specific to particular areas. These may include think tanks that focus on economic areas, like Bruegel. We have regular contact with such bodies. Our economist group invites members of these think tanks to discuss economic issues. We have active interaction with all of these think tanks. We each read the work all these organisations produce and that helps us to see where others countries are coming from. It is an important element in the work we are doing on the future of Europe.

Some of the themes raised in the questions are of interest. We were asked who our contacts are and who we have relations with on particular themes, such as migration, the budget and

climate change. The relations are differentiated. We have done considerable work with Malta and countries on the front line in the southern region that have had the experience of migration in a manner that is far more direct than we have experienced in Ireland. Solidarity and responsibility are the two concepts most associated with what an Irish response could and should be. We have also looked closely at the budget. The negotiations on the multi-annual financial framework are interesting and committee members will see as much if they go online to our EU Explorer tool. One option available to us involves maintaining the same amount of money and the same priorities that we have had. The second scenario involves increasing the amount of money that we have and keeping the same priorities. The third scenario involves increasing the amount of money that we spend and increasing or perhaps changing the priorities from the traditional priorities to accommodate issues such as counter-terrorism and the challenges of migration and climate change. It is envisaged that these discussions will come to a close under the Finnish EU Council Presidency and, if not, in the following Croatian Presidency but well before the German Presidency.

We were asked about parliamentary relations. I know from talking over the years to Deputy Durkan in this context that this committee has been active in developing relations with parliamentary friendship associations in other countries. Perhaps there might not be a grand committee for home affairs in the Parliament at which everyone will get the opportunity to engage. The key is perhaps to break down the issues in justice and home affairs into smaller bite-sized pieces to cover cybersecurity; counter-terrorism; fake news; digital issues associated with privacy; fraud; human trafficking and how blockchain and artificial intelligence affect all areas, including justice and home affairs. Those of us at the institute have found that by engaging with rapporteurs from committees, who have written expert reports, we get a good insight not only into the combined consensus reached in a committee but a more differentiated view of where individual member states are coming from as well.

I will leave the question on personal relationships to Ms Cross, who has experience at first hand of dealing in a diplomatic context with the European Council. In general, the view in the institute has always been that the more engagement we can have, the better, not only at the highest levels but all the way through the different levels in the EU institutions, whether the European Commission, the European Parliament or the European Court of Justice. Going to committees, making friendships and having a direct relationship with people definitely yield a bonus.

I was asked whether Ireland is the bold child of the EU. I think we are now what the Germans would call the *Musterknabe*. We are in fact the model child again in the EU. We had our problems with the banking crisis but I have come back from various visits in Berlin during the months since January and I have been delighted to see how Germany respects the Irish people for the way they dealt with the crisis and how in many ways, the crisis led to a development of entrepreneurship. Where people lost their jobs they suddenly tried to create new jobs. Perhaps the digital area was one of the areas in which this was a possibility. There is a strong sense of cohesion and solidarity in Germany in particular, as well as in other states, for the position of Ireland regarding the backstop and that is certainly music to our ears.

We are working with various countries on climate change. I mentioned earlier that we hosted a major conference last year at which some 500 people attended to discuss solutions to climate change. When I met the French ambassador, H.E. Stéphane Crouzat, we talked about what approach we would take. There is much talk about the threat posed by climate change, the planet burning and the negative issues associated with it. It might be interesting to adopt

a more solutions-oriented approach. Accordingly, we came up with the proposal of a *marché des idées*, a market of ideas. It was a conference to produce many ideas and solutions. We then invited young and older people across the country to enter a competition to come up with ideas to provide solutions to the problem of climate change. We had everything from musicians playing the sounds of a melting iceberg – perhaps not the most practical – and apps developed by younger people to the young lady in Dún Laoghaire who had started work on her machine to draw plastic from Dún Laoghaire Harbour. That is a concrete example. Likewise, in the autumn, with the ESB, we will host a climate change event to look at designing a low-carbon future. We will be looking at energy use in cities. We seem to be drifting towards an urban future where climate change will play an important role. We will be looking at the design of traffic systems and houses, as well as how to make buildings smarter and help people who are willing to invest personally in climate change measures to achieve this.

On the digital side, we have been working in our digital and justice groups on issues associated with cyber security. I will leave the defence issue to Ms Cross who is an expert in the area. We have been looking at issues such as cyber security, critical infrastructure protection and disinformation, with many other areas such as ethics and the governance of artificial intelligence and block chain technology. Again, these are opportunities but also hidden threats, unless frameworks are put in place in advance to enable Ireland to adopt an appropriate position.

Ms Marie Cross: In the presentation we referred to the Hanseatic League – the term may not be welcome at European level – comprising the Nordic and Baltic countries. On the areas referred to by Senator Richmond, the migration budget, the Common Agricultural Policy, CAP, and climate change, those countries have a particular interest in them, although some of them have different views. For example, the Dutch have a somewhat different view on budgets. They are more in favour of budgets sustainability and the CAP. We are working not only with countries with which we have a close relationship on the CAP such as France but also with others which might have a different view. The idea is to convince them of our interests. This applies to EU budgets and climate change.

We are not at the forefront when it comes to migration. We have to make a point of showing empathy and understanding for those countries for which it is a significant issue. Across the European Union, migration is still at the forefront of the issues to be tackled.

Having been involved for many years in different Councils, relations at the European Council amount to an important issue. It is important for us to have good relations with our colleagues in each of the Councils. I have seen Ministers criss-crossing the floor to talk to Ministers of other member states. They have dinner meetings and breakfast meetings before Council meetings. There are groupings for the Benelux, the Nordic and Mediterranean member states. We are an outlier in that we do not have a natural grouping, but it is important that we have contacts at European Council level and with other member states. When one is talking to colleagues, one can explain and also listen. It is invaluable and most important.

As to whether we are bold children, each country has its difficulties, although we might believe we stand out because of the banking crisis. However, others have had banking crises too. Ironically, the Germans have come in for considerable criticism for the way they handled the banking crisis. Was there too much austerity? The Northern Ireland backstop is a specific problem, but the issue of EU unity is bigger than the backstop. When we had discussions with the Germans two weeks ago, they made the case to us that the major issue for the EU 27 was unity and its maintenance. They see it in the Northern Ireland backstop. A country has a problem, but other countries have had problems, including Cyprus and Malta. However, the issue

of EU unity is paramount for other member states.

I am co-chair of the security and defence policy group in the institute. We have people talking about these issues from other member states' views. In the next two weeks we will have a cyber security expert addressing us. There is no doubt that this is an issue for every country. On the EU leaders' agenda, the first point they will approve is protecting citizens and freedom, as well as tackling hybrid threats and cyber security. The institute also has a cyber security committee. We are very much at the forefront in dealing with it and getting experts to talk to people about international threats as they see them.

We have to understand other member states on climate change. They all have different issues in that regard and we must put forward our particular priorities. However, we will have to deal with climate change collaboratively as we cannot do it on our own. It is another significant issue on the leaders' agenda.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I am chairman of the German-Irish parliamentary friendship group and have just left a meeting of it. We were talking about the situation in the North of Ireland. It was really heartening to hear them place in order several issues in terms of their importance. For them, the first and most important issue is the maintenance of the Good Friday Agreement. The second is the integrity of the Single Market. After that, they felt measures that could be put in place for the social development of the island of Ireland, as we move forward in whatever guise, were important. That was really heartening to hear from people who were geographically removed from the island.

Tomorrow morning the German delegation will be in Dundalk to meet civic groups from all communities. If there was a latent aspect to Brexit which we could not have imagined, it would be the familiarisation of foreign governments with the Irish problem. The Institute of International and European Affairs has much to do with it too in terms of how it feeds into other think tanks surrounding the European Commission.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): We have to move on to our second delegation. We will suspend for a moment but before we do I wish to thank our guests for being with us this afternoon. We are very privileged to have had with us two people of their experience and their commitment to European issues over a long number of years. It is a privilege for us to hear from them at first hand. It is of benefit to everybody here.

We will suspend for a few moments while our next delegation takes its place.

Sitting suspended at 3.20 p.m. and resumed at 3.21 p.m.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I welcome our guest speakers from European Movement Ireland, Ms Noelle O'Connell, executive director, and Mr. Daniel Keohane, head of policy and advocacy. Since 1954, European Movement Ireland has been working to strengthen the connection between all sectors of Irish society and Europe. The committee will be familiar with its work and I am sure our guests are familiar with the committee's work. We have a common cause. It is good to have organisations that achieve results and success by engaging with others rather than standing aloof and pointing fingers. That is much better from the point of view of smaller countries like Ireland.

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 outside the Houses or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable. By virtue of section

17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of the evidence they are to give to the committee. If they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to qualified privilege in respect of the evidence they give. They are directed that only evidence connected 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, her or it identifiable. I do not wish to silence our guests with that citation. I just thought I would throw it in to make things interesting. I call on Ms O'Connell to make her opening statement.

Ms Noelle O'Connell: Gabhaim míle buíochas leis an gCathaoirleach Gníomach. Is mór dúinn a bheith i dteannta an choiste inniu le cur i láthair a dhéanamh. Guímid gach rath ar an gcoiste maidir leis an togra fíorthábhachtach seo. I thank the Chair and members for their very kind invitation to attend to today's meeting, the purpose of which is to discuss Irish public opinion on, and engagement with, the European Union. As executive director of European Movement Ireland, I am delighted to present before the committee again. I am particularly pleased to be joined by our head of policy and advocacy, Mr. Daniel Keohane. Mr. Keohane has recently returned to Ireland after spending many years working on the Continent where he focused on a variety of policy areas, particularly defence. With his extensive experience, he will share some valuable insights into some of these topics and how Ireland is perceived by our fellow EU member states.

As members are no doubt aware, European Movement Ireland is Ireland's longest established not-for-profit membership organisation dedicated solely to European issues, founded in 1954. We are a non-partisan, not-for-profit, membership-based organisation. Our aim is to develop the connection between Ireland and the rest of Europe and to increase awareness, understanding and debate of European issues here in Ireland.

It is a privilege and a vital part of our work programme to engage with all Members of the Oireachtas, particularly members of this committee. I congratulate the joint committee on initiating this important and timely debate of how best to engage citizens on the issue of our EU membership as well as the vital subject of alliance-building for Ireland within the European Union. These are topics which demand much more focus and attention over the coming years, particularly as we look ahead towards a European Union which does not contain our nearest neighbour, the UK, as a member state.

Through being an engaged member state, willing to regularly debate EU issues in our national Parliament as well as hearing a range of perspectives and evidence from our EU partners, there is certainly both opportunity and room for Ireland to increase our effectiveness at a broader EU level. Reasoned and robust debate as a country is crucial to enable Ireland to clarify and sophisticate our position on EU policy areas. So too, is hearing where other member states stand on the same issues. This combination will allow us to act maturely and confidently at EU level as we approach the next chapter of the EU's history, with a new Parliament and Commission coming this year, as a union of 27 rather than 28. Such exercises are useful in identifying potential avenues for alliance-building over the coming years.

As an organisation, we continue to be very active in calling for Ireland to continue its robust engagement on the future of Europe process through supporting the work of this committee on the subject as well as working closely with the Minister of State with responsibility for European affairs, Deputy McEntee, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to organise the Government's citizens' consultation process on the future of Europe and through working very

closely with the offices of the European Commission and of the European Parliament offices here in Ireland on this vitally important topic.

At European Movement Ireland, we have found the process of travelling the length and breadth of the country to debate the future of Europe inspiring, invaluable, and incredibly important. From Cavan to Cork, we have gained a huge level of insight about how people in Ireland connect at a local and regional level with our EU relationship. This has also helped us as an organisation in thinking about how we can work best to communicate Europe to citizens and to ensure that debates on EU affairs here in Ireland are as inclusive and relevant to people as possible. The value of participative democracy, of going out to different towns and regions around the country, engaging with people and, crucially, listening to what they have to say, was clear.

If alliance-building is to be productive and a benefit to the Irish public, we must first endeavour to ascertain what Irish people think about the issues on which Ireland is trying to develop alliances. The process has led us to question and explore in greater detail some assumptions we might have previously held about, for example, Irish attitudes to defence co-operation, as well as reaffirming others such as Irish positivity towards remaining an active, committed and engaged member of the European Union. These are issues which we chose to explore further this year in our annual independent poll on Ireland relationship with the EU, of which members of the committee will have received a copy. With the health warning, which members of this committee will no doubt appreciate, that polls are but a snapshot of sentiment at any one time, they nonetheless serve as a useful barometer of peoples' opinions on various issues.

We first began commissioning these polls in 2013 to coincide with Ireland holding the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU with the goal of ascertaining the views of people in Ireland on a range of issues concerning Irish-EU relations. Since then, Red C has been commissioned to conduct the annual Ireland and the EU poll. We have continued to ask some of the questions from the very first poll each year. This really shines a light on how the views of Irish people have evolved over time. It has also helped us to track and annotate these views every year.

Last year's poll showed positivity for Ireland's EU membership at an impressive high, so it is a little unexpected but very welcome to see that support has risen yet again in 2019. A couple of weeks ago, 93% of those polled thought that Ireland should remain in the EU. This figure is consistent with other polling on Irish attitudes to Ireland remaining in the EU. For example, a Kantar poll in April this year found that 91% of Irish people would vote to remain if an in-out referendum were to be held. A Eurobarometer poll in October 2018 found that 92% of Irish people felt that the country had benefitted from EU membership. The most recent polls are all showing incredibly high figures and support for Ireland remaining in the EU, at well over 90%. Since Brexit, there has been a rise in support for the EU across many member states as some of the effects, challenges and complexities of leaving the EU become clear. In our first annual poll in 2013 support for EU membership was at 81% and, as I just mentioned, we are now at 93%. This "Brexit bounce" or "Brexit dividend", as it were, has helped to increase support for the EU across the member states, not only in Ireland. We would argue, however, that Irish support for the EU goes much deeper than Brexit. I will now pass over to my colleague, Mr. Keohane, to speak more to that point. He will also concentrate on some of the other questions explored in this year's poll, and on what its results tell us about the policy areas in which we might seek to build alliances with other like-minded member states.

Mr. Daniel Keohane: Is mór an onóir liomsa a bheith anseo le Noelle O'Connell ar son

foirne Gluaiseacht na hEorpa in Éirinn. As Ms O’Connell said, there has been a so-called Brexit bounce or dividend reflected in our poll. There is no doubt about that. We asked a specific question about Brexit, namely whether it had improved the respondent’s opinion of the European Union. The answer was a strong agree at 58%, but arguably that was not as high as one might expect, given how strong EU support for Ireland’s national interests has been during the Brexit story. Brexit has made us all very aware of how valuable the EU is for our daily lives, even more so than before.

Another way to think about all this is that the Brexit bounce was building on something that was very strong already. In our first poll in 2013, Irish support for EU membership was at 81%. It went up to 93% this year, which is staggeringly high. Support for membership was already high, however, long before Brexit was even being seriously discussed or debated. It is worth bearing in mind that the Brexit effect is purely augmenting something that was very strong already. This is also borne out by other questions in our poll. We asked, for example, if Irish people would be willing to contribute more to the EU budget. If people are willing to pay more for something, it usually indicates that they like it. In this case, 58% agreed with the statement that they would like to contribute more to the EU budget to continue to get the benefits of membership. It is very clear that we are aware of what Ireland has received from the EU and that we want to receive those benefits continuously and for everyone to continue to receive them. It is telling that respondents in Ireland are willing to pay more into the budget. That is not always the image of Ireland in other EU member states because we are seen to have benefitted so much. Now we are willing to pay more.

Since it is 20 years since the common currency, the euro, was launched in 1999, we asked how Irish people feel about it. The question was whether the euro has been a positive thing for Ireland. It was an extremely high positive result; an impressive 86% agreed with the statement. As Ms O’Connell said, I have been away for the past 22 years, since before the euro was launched. It was still punts when I left. Ireland has had a very mixed economic experience over the last 22 years. Let us say it has been very up and down; some would say it has been a roller coaster. Yet the euro is seen as an incredibly positive thing for Ireland. This is interesting in itself. In the UK, it is very common to blame the euro for the economic problems in Ireland, Italy, Greece, Spain, Portugal and so on. That is not how Irish people feel about it, it seems. That is the not the story of those of us who use the euro.

We also asked about openness to co-operation in a few more sensitive policy areas, such as tax. As we all know, there is a very interesting debate about tax in Ireland and in the world, for example at the OECD with the United States, France and so on. It surprised all of us at European Movement Ireland that fully half of respondents said they were open to more co-operation on tax. That is a very open statement. It does not refer explicitly to fiscal policy, tax rates, tax bases, corporate tax specifically, or digital tax specifically. It was a very broad question. It does suggest, however, that there might be more openness among the Irish population to discuss tax at EU level than is sometimes perceived from outside.

We also asked about security and defence. For the third year in a row we asked if Ireland should be part of increased co-operation in security and defence. For the third year in a row, we got practically the same answer, with the figure consistently around the 58% mark. This year it was 58%, last year it was 57% and in 2017 it was 59%. That is a striking pattern and it flies in the face of the image that some people have of the Irish debate around these subjects and indeed sometimes the image people have of Irish activity on these subjects. However, this result is lower than some other polls on the subject. For example, in a Eurobarometer poll about a year

ago, nearly two thirds said they were for EU security and defence co-operation. It is a slightly different statement but members will get my point. A lot depends on how one frames the question. If one asks people if they want to co-operate with others more, they will generally be more positive. If we ask people if they want to sign up to an EU army, they will generally be much less positive, as was shown by the recent RTÉ-Red C poll, which asked a number of questions about neutrality and had a specific question about joining “European armed forces” which, of course, is not on the table; there is no such proposal. Only a third responded positively in that case. Clearly citizens - the Irish public - know the difference between co-operating with others, as we do at UN level as well, and joining an EU army. It is very important that this distinction is made. It is sometimes missed in the public debate. We saw this during the European Parliament election campaign as well. There is a difference between a European army run by Brussels and governments co-operating on peacekeeping or on having better capabilities and equipment for their armed forces. They are two very different questions but it seems as though Irish respondents clearly know the difference.

I will move on to alliance building. The so-called Brexit dividend is only a small extra interest rate on top of what was very strong already, namely, Irish support for remaining in the EU. There is a general openness to more co-operation and to building on what is there. Ireland is already highly aware that it needs to build alliances and coalitions. We tend to be quite good at joining coalitions. Everyone knows that we are already part of the New Hanseatic League, as it is called, which is led by the Netherlands, with Nordic and Baltic states. It is a policy-specific coalition in the eurozone. It might evolve into something broader, but we will have to wait and see. It is worth debating whether Ireland wants to be involved in something broader.

That brings me to a bigger point. Ireland will have a major structural disadvantage after Brexit when we will no longer have a next-door neighbour in the European Union. We are not part of a regional grouping, unlike most EU member states. For example, we can think about the Baltic, Nordic, Benelux and Visegrád countries and so on. This is a major disadvantage for Ireland. Based on some recent studies by the European Council on Foreign Relations of coalition building and cohesion which I highly recommend, only a few EU member states consider Ireland to be a potentially important partner. They include Cyprus and Malta which are small islands like Ireland. It is worth reflecting on this as it suggests we have a major challenge ahead of us after Brexit in alliance building.

All EU member states will try to influence France and Germany. It is wonderful that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is investing much more in these relationships, including having consulates in Frankfurt and Lyon. Based on how I analyse what came from the European Council on Foreign Relations, perhaps we should be investing much more in relationships with countries such as Denmark and Portugal. They are not the first two countries one might think of in alliance building, but I stress our structural weakness. Why, therefore, have I picked Denmark and Portugal? Denmark joined the Common Market, as it was then called, at the same time we did, with the United Kingdom, in 1973. Like us, it also has a history with referendums on EU treaties. It has similar interests in global trade and agriculture. There is, therefore, a natural alliance of interests and an openness in Denmark to Irish ideas. The same is true of Portugal which has similar interests to Ireland in trade and agriculture. We should not forget that it shares a time zone with Ireland. It also has a very strong Atlantic identity. In other words, we need to start to think a little outside the box and more strategically, rather than tactically. We are extremely good at joining coalitions in policy-specific areas, but we need to think a little more in the medium to long term in a strategic fashion.

As the former Secretary General of the European Commission, Dr. Catherine Day, elegantly noted when she spoke to this committee on 3 April, Ireland has a very defensive image among the rest of the European Union. I am more blunt. Other countries believe we are very quick to say “No” in corporate tax discussions, some defence discussions or on other issues. We are seen as very slow to initiate a policy idea of our own and I cannot think of one right now. I am sure somebody will correct me or I will be criticised for saying this, but that is fine. We must also bear in mind that we have been shown incredible solidarity on Brexit. The other 26 governments in the European Union have shown Ireland incredible solidarity on the backstop. I would be very happy to debate why that is the case, as there is a host of geopolitical, geo-economic and value reasons for it. The others care about a peace process and let us not forget that in itself the European Union is a peace process. However, some day some of those member states may ask for that solidarity to be reciprocated. Some of these countries such as Sweden and Finland are not members of NATO and are facing serious aggression from Russia, including military and non-military action. Are we prepared to support them on their vital national interests of peace and security in the same way they have supported us in our vital national interests of peace and security?

A final challenge will be to develop Ireland-based knowledge of the European Union and depend less on English language analysis from the rest of the non-EU anglophone world. That will be a big challenge for us. Only one Irish newspaper, for example - *The Irish Times* - has correspondents in the main EU capitals beyond Brussels. They include Paris, Berlin, Rome and Madrid. There is a lot of growth potential to have Ireland-based knowledge in that respect. This weakness could become a strength. After Brexit, Ireland will be the largest EU member state in which English is an official language. Malta is the other. Of course, Ireland will want the relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and Canada to be as strong as possible. That is in all of our interests. In other words, there is great potential for Ireland to position itself as an obvious partner for those in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and so on who share the objective of having better UK-EU, transatlantic and global relationships. That, in turn, will help us to strengthen at a time when, if we are honest, things have been difficult between the United Kingdom and Ireland. It will help to rebuild trust and relationships with the United Kingdom and strengthen the relationship with the United States and others even more. Brexit has been and will remain challenging for Ireland but in many ways the post-Brexit European Union will be even more challenging for Ireland.

Ms Noelle O’Connell: May I make some concluding remarks?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I will bring in committee members now, but the delegates will be able to contribute again.

Senator Neale Richmond: I thank Mr. Keohane as usually I am the one who is accused of depressing people when describing future relationships. He has outlined a number of very clear challenges in a stark and welcome way. It feeds into much of the work we are doing.

What policy should we be initiating or where is the scope to initiate particular policies? The term “investing in relations” is great. One of the great achievements of this and the previous Government is that during the austerity years we maintained the diplomatic network throughout the European Union. The strengthening of the Permanent Representation in Brussels is most welcome. Beyond this, how can we specifically invest in developing relations? It is evident that we have seen a great deal of solidarity. This morning I met a delegation from the Bundestag. Are we taking that solidarity for granted and how far will it get us if, ideally, we move

to the second phase and speak about future relations after Brexit, or if we face the more likely challenge presented by a no-deal scenario?

I have some country-specific questions. It is interesting that the Danish and Portuguese Parliaments sent delegations to us recently from their European affairs and Brexit committees. I acknowledge everything Mr. Keohane noted. I do not want to pick at matters as we have a great relationship with both countries. The obvious challenge in deepening relations with Portugal, in particular, is presented by the language barrier. As we know, Irish people do not have a great ability to speak a second or third language and there is a particular weakness when it comes to speaking languages like Portuguese. We may have French or German speakers, but barring a few of my friends who are married to people from Portugal or Brazil, if I am honest, I do not know anybody who can speak Portuguese. How can we work on this or improve matters in that regard? How can it be removed as an obstacle to developing that strategic alliance? With the Danes, it is a far more political point. I do not expect Ms O'Connell and Mr. Keohane to go into the politics of Denmark too much but there is in Denmark, as in the United Kingdom, a lingering Euroscepticism. We see that reflected in the recent election results. While the Social Democrats have come back into power in Denmark, it is a very different social democratic party from, for instance, the social democratic parties in southern Europe or elsewhere where migration has been a much bigger factor. Indeed, while we have great commonalities with the Danes and very warm relationships, are there areas, especially in agriculture where we are perhaps more competitors than allies, and how do we get over that and make sure that we get the most out of that strategic alliance?

The French and German alliance was mentioned. I fundamentally believe that we need to maintain the strength of our relationship, and if everyone is looking to improve that alliance, so be it. The Franco-German alliance will dominate the EU post Brexit more than it has in a long time. That is merely a fact of life. We are lucky that we have such a strong relationship with those two member states at diplomatic, political and parliamentary levels. I would always have seen a strong relationship, definitely at a political and governmental level but also at an internal political level, with the Benelux countries. To be party political, when I attended meetings on behalf of Fine Gael or Young Fine Gael, our natural allies were always the Christian Democrats from the Benelux region. It is literally who we sat beside for dinner. We were able to work together on a range of common motions on what we believed Europe to be in terms of a Union of values and law and order, as well as an economic Union and a social Union. I note that the Dutch royals are visiting Ireland at present and I am lucky to be attending the event with however many others tomorrow evening. They met the President today. I still think those are two relationships on which, going back to my earlier point, we cannot take anything for granted in terms of solidarity. We also cannot take for granted the relationships with the Germans, French, Dutch, Belgians or any of our European partners, because I would maintain we have very good relationships with all the other 26 and the United Kingdom as a departing member state.

Deputy Seán Haughey: I thank European Movement Ireland for its presentation. Both speakers here are regular attenders at this committee. I thank them for their work on the future of Europe and the consultation which took place throughout the country. It was a useful exercise in engaging the citizens in that process so that everybody felt part of the agenda in planning a new future for Europe.

I note that the Government has since published the national statement on the future of Europe. It was debated briefly in the Dáil, just before Easter, in April. I guess that feeds into the strategic agenda. I thank the witnesses for their work on that.

There is much food for thought in regard to future alliances. There was a hard-hitting contribution from Mr. Keohane which we will have to consider seriously in our work at this committee.

Ms O’Connell was cut off on turnout in the European Parliament elections, but I see in her written contribution that turnout in Ireland was down and below the European average for the first time. Certainly, as somebody who was canvassing in those elections, the local elections seemed to be more important to the voters. I think that not one voter raised a European issue with me on the doorstep, and that is a little disappointing. We must get people more engaged with the European Parliament elections. I do not know how we will do that. Considering that European issues were at the top of the national agenda, that is a little disappointing.

What are Ms O’Connell’s thoughts on the new European Parliament that has been elected? There has not been a swing to the populists and the far right as expected or to the extent that was expected. It seems now that there is a diverse fragmented centre, with the Greens doing particularly well throughout Europe as well, and various alliances will have to be formed when it comes to the groupings, the filling of the positions, the role of the European Parliament in that, etc. What is Ms O’Connell’s view generally on the new European Parliament and how it will function? Will it be effective?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I should explain to the witnesses the comings and goings of members. During the course of the debate, the Seanad is sitting and votes arise. They have to go to vote. Otherwise a problem arises.

I note Ms O’Connell has another paragraph or two to divulge to us. I note the way the debate has been moving in recent weeks in Europe and there being a *quid pro quo* for one type of support or another. I am not sure that is the right way to go. Europe had a test with the economic crash, and there is a debate as to whether Germany went the right way. It should not be forgotten that Germany has a history of quantitative easing and it is not a happy one. It was obviously reluctant to go in that direction again. Not everybody understands that but it is a fact of life.

The most important aspect of recent events is that all the European 27 member states have stood together. My belief is that they have done so because they recognise the writing on the wall. Do we want a Europe in the future or do we want a disjointed Europe, a two-speed Europe or a broken-up Europe? Having listened to the comments of some who say they want freedom from Europe, I ask what is freedom? Can we define freedom? What is our state of mind when it comes to determining it? One person’s freedom might be another person’s incarceration. We need to know that we have some experience ourselves in those areas as well.

I believe we have responsibility for matters such as taxation and security, and we have no difficulty debating that. The fact of life is that, geographically, we are not in the centre of Europe and we are at a disadvantage. This will be particularly the case in the aftermath of Brexit. We are on the fringe. The countries on the fringe or on the outer rim, as in the analogy of the wheel that I have used previously, feel the draught first and the heat last. We need to learn from that. We can learn a lot from European history, the way things have happened, and the way things can lead in the future. All we need is recognition. We need to proceed in a unified fashion, supporting each other as opposed to poking the bricks out of the wall, so to speak, to improve the circumference of the wheel. It has not always worked.

Ms Noelle O’Connell: I thank the Acting Chairman, Deputy Durkan, Deputy Haughey,

Senator Richmond and Senator Craughwell for their comments and inputs. The Acting Chairman touched on a very important point in terms of European history. It goes to demonstrate and illustrate the importance, if ever it was needed, of how crucial it is that the subject of history is on the curriculum. I appreciate that probably is not a subject for this committee but it is one that we need to bear in mind and consider.

We might do our Cork two-hander and continue the winning formula. I will touch upon some of the topics that Senator Richmond picked up and address some of Deputy Haughey's valid points. On anything that I omit, I am sure my colleague, Mr. Keohane, will perform an excellent sweeper role on that policy side of things.

Senator Richmond raised an important point in terms of languages and the language barrier. This is something about which we in EM Ireland are incredibly exercised, along with our colleagues and partners in the Commission and the European Parliament, and obviously as are the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Minister. I refer to the area of the EU jobs committee and the work of encouraging and promoting a career in the European institutions as a viable and valuable career pipeline and career opportunity. That Irish pipeline is concerning. That is why concerted efforts are ongoing to ensure that language abilities are improved. However, the Senator is right. It is a challenge and something that needs more focus and support to be given to it. The Permanent Representation in Brussels is doing a lot of work, but we need to figure out creative ways to enhance our collective efforts to ensure the Irish presence at all levels and in all institutions will continue to play an important role.

Deputy Haughey touched on the agenda for the debate on the future of Europe. I thank him for his ongoing support for and engagement in it. When we were in Letterkenny, Cork, Navan, Kilkenny and Wexford, the topics debated reinforced how important it was to listen to what people were saying and try to get their views and perspectives, for example, on defence, sustainability and climate change. The consistency in the level of concern expressed about climate change and sustainability was incredible wherever we engaged in dialogue on the future of Europe. It is important and clear that we cannot be complacent. If Brexit demonstrates anything, it is the impossibility of reversing over 40 years of negative discourse and diatribe. The engagement in Ireland on how we would like to shape our European Union membership must be constant. We have to view the engagement with citizens as an ongoing process, rather than as a stand-alone event, if we are to truly develop, articulate and defend a comprehensive Irish vision of the European Union in which we want to live.

I can empathise with the challenges mentioned by Deputy Haughey encountered in the European Parliament elections. Ours was one of the few organisations that invited all 59 candidates standing for election to the European Parliament to participate in a candidates debate to present their views and perspectives and say why they were standing for election. We did this as part of a series of three constituency debates and engagements. It was a challenge to move the debate to some of the non-local issues and focus on European issues. Nonetheless, it was an important and worthwhile exercise.

We were disappointed that this time around voter turnout dropped from 52% to 49.7%. It was the first time in 25 years that voter turnout in Ireland was below the overall EU average which stood at 51%, reversing the overall decline in voter turnout since the first European Parliament elections were held. We welcome the increase in voter turnout across the European Union. It is encouraging and a sign of greater citizen engagement, notwithstanding the challenges presented by populism that have been mentioned. Our civic objective and responsibility must be to work constructively with the committee and other partners to reverse the decline in

voter turnout here in the next European Parliament elections.

That leads me on to what we are debating. Alliance building is not just an activity for our political leaders, politicians and Members of national parliaments, it is also part of a whole-of-Ireland approach. Whether it be civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, NGOs, business groups, trade associations and chambers of commerce, there is a collective onus to include all sectors of Irish society in the dialogue on relationship building. European Movement Ireland is actively doing this with its counterparts in the European Movement International network which has a presence in over 40 countries as far as Azerbaijan. We also try to support and amplify the work being done by many other organisations and trade associations. It is a very important aspect of their work.

I will hand over to Mr. Keohane in case I have forgotten anything.

Mr. Daniel Keohane: Building on what Ms O’Connell said, I reiterate the point that having an all-of-Ireland approach to the debate on the future of Europe should be the basic principle. I personally would love if the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade could be doubled in size as quickly as possible. We have very small diplomatic capacity, but, thankfully, we manage to have diplomats in every EU member state and most member states of the Council of Europe. Not every EU member state has this. I understand we are to open an embassy in Kiev next year, or perhaps sooner. We must maintain that capacity which we need to increase to have a presence in all member states. All member states are our partners, not only France and Germany. Looking beyond what the Government could do, organisations such as ours which have EU and Europe-wide networks are invaluable, whether they are business, trade union, civil society or sectoral networks. To use the seanfhocal, an té nach bhfuil láidir ní foláir dó a bheith glic. The small or weak man has to be clever. We have to be clever in how we think about where we put our resources. I am not imagining that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade will be doubled in size by next year, but I hope it will have more resources in the next decade.

I made the point about Portugal and Denmark deliberately to encourage people to think hard about this issue because all of the other 24 member states will want to talk to Paris and Berlin. Germany has more neighbours than my beloved County Meath. It has a lot of neighbours. That is a lot of people to talk to and try to keep happy. The same applies to France. Territorially, we are relatively isolated. In that respect, Ireland is the Aran Islands, but if it is not possible to talk to the main person, one talks to their adviser or best friend. France and Germany’s best friends are already pretty busy, but the Netherlands is an obvious place. Sweden is also an obvious place as it is at the heart of Nordic co-operation. The Netherlands is at the heart of Benelux co-operation. It is also leading the Hanseatic League. Suddenly one ends up with Denmark and Portugal which may get less love from their neighbours. Spain does not talk to Portugal as much as it probably should. Sweden does not talk to Denmark as much as it probably should. Neither does the Netherlands. Why, therefore, do we not talk to them? Our only natural allies are Malta and Cyprus. I want to keep them on our side as it were, but I would also like us to build more of an Irish network.

To respond to Deputy Haughey’s great question about the European Parliament, the next European Parliament will be very complicated. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, ALDE, which includes Fianna Fáil and the Alliance Party in Northern Ireland is being reconfigured with the accession of President Macron’s Renaissance group. Even the Socialist Party of Portuguese Prime Minister Costa is thinking about joining it. As a group, the number of Liberals went up, as did the numbers of Greens, including the numbers of Irish and German Greens. The numbers in the centre left Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats and

the centre right European People's Party groups went down slightly. The overall number in the block of moderates went down slightly, from approximately 526 to 506, but I may be wrong on the precise figures. However, the drop was very slight. The extremes did not gain much, but the European Parliament will be more fragmented than it was precisely because those in the centre left and centre right lost seats to the Liberals and the Greens. We can play with this in all sorts of ways, but it is worth remembering that political groups in the European Parliament are alliances of national parties, not full-blown political parties. Deputy Haughey knows this better than I do. They do not always vote together in the same way. I am not sure politicians in Fine Gael always agree with the German Christian Democrats on tax, for instance, which is fine. I do not know whether Fianna Fáil MEPs like Barry Andrews will agree with President Macron's party, which is fine too. That is the way it should be. Ultimately, all of these MEPs are independent or represent national parties. That fact should not be overlooked.

Perhaps the bigger story is how the far left or united left group which includes Sinn Féin, independent MEP Luke 'Ming' Flanagan, Podemos and Syriza lost some seats. Perhaps Deputy Clare Daly might join this group. There is about to be a general election in Greece. It is interesting that this group which describes itself as Eurocritical, if I understood the Sinn Féin MEP candidates correctly, lost some seats. The Eurosceptic centre-right conservative and reformist group which includes the Polish Law and Justice party and the UK Conservatives, both of which are in government in their respective countries, also lost seats. What is going on? The problem is that far-right nationalists gained seats, mainly because of Matteo Salvini's Lega Nord party. Marine Le Pen's National Rally party stayed static on 23 seats, if I remember correctly. The Lega Nord party went from five seats to 28. I think that was the final figure. Those on the far right gained. The Brexit Party was in talks with those on the far right.

As members will be aware, the overall size of the European Parliament will be reduced. Ireland and other countries will gain seats. In a nutshell, it will be more complicated. I know that is not a useful answer, but it is the simplest one. The easiest way to answer the question is to say we need to see beyond the groups. The good news is that the moderate centre in European politics has held. We remember that during the last elections and the Brexit referendum in 2016 it sounded like the Dutch were thinking about a Nexit and that Marine Le Pen might push for a Frexit. All of this was being spoken about as recently as 2017, but the sceptics have become less sceptical since Brexit. Hardly anyone in the Netherlands is calling for a Nexit and not even Marine Le Pen is calling for a Frexit. Even though Matteo Salvini hates the bond markets, he is not calling for an exit from the euro. That tells us everything we need to know.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Keohane and Ms O'Connell for being with us. We are honoured to have them here. We know from our dealings with them during the years that the extent and breadth of their knowledge of these subjects go before them. We thank them for giving us some of their time.

The joint committee went into private session at 4.15 p.m. and adjourned at 4.25 p.m. until 2 p.m. on Wednesday, 26 June 2019.