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On the project

Due to the new treaty provisions of the Lisbon Treaty and the economic crises the enlarged EU of 27 member states is on the search for a new modus operandi while also continuing membership talks with candidate countries. The EU-27 Watch project is mapping out discourses on these and more issues in European policies all over Europe. Research institutes from all 27 member states and the four candidate countries give overviews on the discourses in their respective countries.

The reports focus on a **reporting period from December 2009 until May 2010**. This survey was conducted on the basis of a questionnaire that has been elaborated in March and April 2010. Most of the 31 reports were delivered in May 2010. This issue and all previous issues are available on the EU-27 Watch website: www.EU-27Watch.org.

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Ireland**Jury still out on Lisbon**

Shane Fitzgerald*

The provisions of the Lisbon Treaty are probably more familiar to the weary voters of Ireland than to any other citizens in Europe. Although two hard-fought referendum campaigns saw everything from abortion to military conscription to unemployment being deployed as political weapons and distractions, the core innovations of the treaty did get a fair airing and are relatively well understood. Less well understood is how exactly these innovations will play out in practice. The work of President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy, for example, is watched with interest in Ireland but, in the context of a landscape of European political leadership that remains cluttered and contested, a consensus as to the skill with which he is carrying out his duties has yet to be reached.

A similar benefit of doubt extends to Catherine Ashton in her new role as High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. To the degree that the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is a benign and progressive one, Ireland is keen that it projects it as effectively as possible and therefore welcomes any initiative that helps Europe express its priorities more clearly on the world stage. While there are – arising out of Ireland's tradition of military neutrality – certain concerns relating to European cooperation in the defence arena, these were to a large extent allayed by the specific guarantees sought and secured by the Irish government ahead of the second referendum on the Lisbon Treaty.¹

With regard to Catherine Ashton's relations with the European Council, Ireland will be hoping in particular that she enjoys good relations with the incoming British government. A good working relationship between the UK and its EU partners is important for all member states but especially so for its nearest island neighbour. The geographic, economic and historic ties between Ireland and the UK are such that an actively Eurosceptic Britain could have profound and detrimental effects on the Irish national interest. One Irish hope would be that the work of Catherine Ashton might act to advertise and normalise the European Union to a sceptical British press and population.

Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union in the consolidated version of the Lisbon Treaty commits the EU's international affairs to be guided by the principles of "democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law." Ireland will be supportive of policies which further such principles. However, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Micheál Martin, emphasises the declaration attached to the treaty which makes clear that its CFSP provisions do not affect the existing responsibilities of member states for the formulation and conduct of their distinctive foreign policy.² As a small, neutral state, this is a crucial area of sensitivity for Ireland and the preservation of these assurances will be watched for carefully. Given the nature of EU missions as defined by the Petersburg tasks and the predominance of civil over military missions, Ireland has, to date, been able to play a full role in respect of its treaty commitments (for example, an Irish commander, Pat Nash, led the recent EUFOR mission to Chad on the ground).

As to the issue of the European External Action Service (EEAS), the government position, at a time of great constraint on state resources, is that the EEAS will provide an opportunity to leverage Irish diplomacy both in the European context and in the international arena. The Minister for Foreign Affairs is of the opinion that "there will be a real benefit to the State through the experience gained by the rotation of Irish officials between the EEAS and the Irish diplomatic service."³ Speculation as to the appointment of Irish diplomats and Commission officials to key positions in the new service has already begun.⁴ If there are concerns over the EEAS in the national debate, they relate to the danger of Ireland losing its distinctive national voice overseas.

Ireland performed strongly when it last held the rotating council presidency in 2004, taking advantage of the leverage that the previous system afforded small countries with the capacity to act strategically. Ireland will next host the presidency in early 2013 as the first in a trio which includes Lithuania and

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Greece. Irish observers will be watching the intervening presidencies closely to learn how to operate most effectively under the new regime.

One issue that has been raised in the domestic debate is the new dynamics of meetings of the European Council under the Lisbon Treaty. Previously, these meetings were between the heads of state and government and their foreign ministers. Now, just the heads of state and government meet, although they can decide to be accompanied by a minister. There is a concern, which has been expressed in the UK also,⁵ that removing foreign ministers from the European Council network might lead to a shift in foreign policy making from Foreign Affairs departments to Prime Ministerial ones. In a political system such as Ireland's which tends towards a coalition government, one could anticipate tensions arising in a future coalition in which the two departments were headed by ministers from different parties.

The issue of the democratic legitimacy of the European Union, although prominent in the national debate over the Lisbon Treaty, is not as big a concern among the largely pro-European Irish electorate as it is among more Eurosceptic populations such as those of the UK, France or the Netherlands. It is also widely understood that the Lisbon Treaty contains many apparent remedies to the EU's "democratic deficit", including a strengthened European Parliament, a bigger role for national parliaments in legislative scrutiny, and a new European Citizens' Initiative (ECI).

Insofar as the ECI empowers citizens and increases democracy in the Union, it will be welcomed by Irish people and their elected representatives. However, concern is likely to be expressed at any Commission attempt to neuter the initiative by setting high barriers to participation or by stringently filtering the petitions through mechanisms such as the "admissibility check" recently discussed by Vice-President of the European Commission Maroš Šefčovič.⁶

The opposition Labour Party's spokesman on Europe, Joe Costello, notes that, although there are a host of thorny issues to be resolved before the initiative is up and running, there has been "precious little public debate" in Ireland so far.⁷ The Oireachtas (Irish Parliament) Joint Committee on European Affairs has published a report on the ECI in which it expresses its support, saying that the initiative "has the potential to create a real public space within the European Union and contribute to bridging the so-called 'democratic deficit'".⁸ But, as a member of the opposition Fine Gael party, Lucinda Creighton, said in this context in the Oireachtas recently: "It is important that the European Union is seen to deliver on commitments made to the people, particularly in Ireland given that we held a referendum. Those commitments must be tangible and delivered."⁹

In respect of demonstrating the integrity of European democracy, the Irish government must also deliver on its own commitments. A revised programme for government, agreed in October in the wake of the second Lisbon referendum, contained an express commitment to push for the early adoption of legislation to establish the ECI.¹⁰ The Irish government, at a time of widespread public disillusionment and anger at the political establishment, will be keen to help get this one right. If the mechanism does not provide a proper vehicle for democratic expression, it will be ridiculed. But if appropriate safeguards are not put in place, a cascade of populist, or even extremist, petitions might ensue, with damaging effects on the reputation of both the government and the EU.

The revised programme for government also committed to ensuring that the Oireachtas more closely engages with European institutions and affairs. To that end, an Oireachtas Sub-Committee on the Review of the Role of the Oireachtas in European Affairs is examining how the parliament can best use the new powers and entitlements granted to it under the Lisbon Treaty. It will be issuing its report in the coming weeks. Its findings are likely to lead to a significant revision of the way in which the parliament deals with EU matters, including but not limited to parliamentary scrutiny of legislation emanating from Brussels.¹¹ A number of civil society and professional organisations, including the Law Society of Ireland and the Irish Society for European Law, are currently conducting research in this area. Gavin Barrett of University College Dublin argues that Ireland's failure in the past to address adequately matters of democratic accountability means that it has more ground to make up than other member states in this area.¹²

¹ See for example: Institute of International and European Affairs: Lisbon: The Irish Guarantees Explained, available at: <http://www.iea.com/publications/lisbon-the-irish-guarantees-explained> (last access: 10 May 2010).

² KildareStreet.com: Dáil written answers: Tuesday, 30 March 2010. Department of Foreign Affairs: Diplomatic Representation, available at: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrants/?id=2010-03-30.688.0&s=catherine+ashton#g690.0.r> (last access: 10 May 2010).

³ KildareStreet.com: Dáil written answers: Thursday, 1 April 2010. Department of Foreign Affairs: European External Action Service, available at: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrants/?id=2010-04-01.1162.0> (last access: 10 May 2010).

⁴ Reported in The Sunday Business Post, available at: <http://www.sbpost.ie/news/ireland/irish-diplomats-tipped-for-ec-jobs-49132.html> (last access: 10 May 2010).

⁵ See for example: House of Commons: Foreign Affairs Committee Transcript, available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmfa/c144-i/c14402.htm> (last access: 10 May 2010).

⁶ Reported by Euractiv: EU commissioner vows to block 'silly' petitions, 6 May 2010, available at: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/future-eu/eu-commissioner-vows-block-silly-petitions-news-493794> (last access: 10 May 2010).

⁷ Joe Costello: Issues around EU citizens' initiative should be tackled, Irish Times, 2 February 2010, available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2010/0202/1224263579088.html> (last access: 19 May 2010).

⁸ Oireachtas Joint Committee on European Affairs EU Scrutiny Report No. 6, available at: <http://euaffairs.ie/publications/6th-Scrutiny-Report.pdf> (last access: 9 June 2010).

⁹ Dáil debates: Wednesday, 31 March 2010. European Council Meeting: Statements, available at: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/debate/?id=2010-03-31.300.0> (last access: 10 May 2010).

¹⁰ Green Party: Renewed Programme for Government, 10 October 2009, available at: http://www.greenparty.ie/en/government/renewed_programme_for_government_pdf_for_mat (last access: 10 May 2010).

¹¹ Sub-Committee on Review of the Role of the Oireachtas in European Affairs Home Page, available at: <http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=14847> (last access: 10 May 2010).

¹² Gavin Barrett: Reviewing the Role of the Oireachtas in European Affairs, available at: <http://www.ilea.com/publications/reviewing-the-role-of-the-oireachtas-in-european-affairs> (last access: 19 May 2010).

Ireland**Enlarging Ireland**

Shane Fitzgerald*

The government's stated position is that "the accession process provides strong encouragement for political and economic reform and that future enlargement will help to promote stability, security and prosperity in Europe."¹ While the accession of ten new member states in 2004 was greeted with great fanfare and celebration in Ireland, there is also a keen awareness that enlargement creates greater competition for foreign investment, which has been a key driver of Irish economic growth in recent years.² The fact that the newer member states are closer to the main EU markets and have lower labour costs has already damaged Irish interests as major multinationals shift their manufacturing operations from Ireland to Poland and elsewhere.³ This awareness is somewhat balanced by the knowledge that Ireland benefited greatly from the labour and skills pool of the new member states during its recent boom and that further eastward expansion provides an opportunity to diversify its trade patterns in an enlarged European single market. But, in a climate of economic recession and renewed emigration, a degree of scepticism about the benefits of further enlargement is likely to remain.

Croatian accession is likely to prove unproblematic from an Irish perspective. However, key issues – such as the ability of Albania, Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro to meet the accession requirements, the status of Kosovo, the ongoing name dispute between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and unresolved tensions between Cyprus and Turkey – represent obstacles which must be overcome before further eastern expansion is likely to be wholeheartedly welcomed from an Irish perspective. Assuming a resolution of the name dispute, Macedonian accession will probably pass with little comment from Irish sources. Turkish membership, for the same reasons that are familiar across Europe, might prove a harder sell, though the Minister for Foreign Affairs describes Ireland's approach to Turkey's candidacy as "supportive". He also notes that there are "potential gains to the single market and to trade through the accession of a country of Turkey's size" and that "[t]he Union's reach and influence in the Middle East and Central Asia could be enhanced through Turkish accession".⁴ The prospect of Turkish accession was raised in a negative light during the two Lisbon referendums, but it is not clear what effect, if any, this negative campaigning had on voting patterns.

Perhaps because of Ireland's geographic location in the north-western corner of Europe, European Neighbourhood Policy and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership have not gained much traction in the public discourse. However, an increasing awareness of the importance of Europe's eastern and southern neighbourhood, particularly in terms of energy security, is beginning to raise the profile of these initiatives. Strong bilateral relationships with Moldova and Georgia also play a significant role in terms of perceptions of developments in frozen conflicts.

There is much general sympathy in Ireland for Iceland's difficulties and in bilateral contacts the Irish government has told the government of Iceland that it is supportive of its application for EU membership.⁵

Because Ireland has had, on balance, a generally positive experience with migration from Eastern Europe, and with the integration of communities of "New Irish", there is little objection in principle to European enlargement to encompass many of the former Balkan and Baltic states. However, what will be looked for, especially in the wake of the Greek debt crisis with its contagion effects for Ireland, is solid evidence of each candidate country's fiscal solvency and political stability.

The next Irish general election must take place by 2012 at the latest. It is difficult to say if immigration will become an issue in that contest, but, as has been the case elsewhere in Europe, we can anticipate that, at some stage, the issue will become more politicised, with consequent effects for how the prospect of further enlargement is viewed. However, as many European immigrants have returned home in response to the Irish recession, the potential negative employment effects of immigration have been muted up to now.

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¹ Dáil written answers: Tuesday, 15 December 2009. Department of Foreign Affairs: EU Enlargement, available at: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2009-12-15.1541.0> (last access: 10 May 2010).

² Department of Foreign Affairs: EU Enlargement – Ireland Leading the Way, available at: www.dfa.ie/home/index.aspx?id=28462 (last access: 10 May 2010).

³ See for example this statement from Dell: Dell to Migrate Manufacturing Operations from Ireland to Poland and Partners by Early 2010, available at: http://www.dell.com/content/topics/global.aspx/corp/pressoffice/en/2009/2009_01_08_rr_000?c=us&l=en (last access: 10 May 2010).

⁴ Dáil written answers: Tuesday, 30 March 2010. Department of Foreign Affairs: EU Enlargement, available at: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2010-03-30.696.0> (last access: 10 May 2010).

⁵ Dáil written answers: Tuesday, 22 September 2009. Department of Foreign Affairs: EU Enlargement, available at: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2009-09-22.1244.0> (last access: 10 May 2010).

Ireland**Irish concerned about tax and treaties**

Shane Fitzgerald*

The initial stabilisation achieved by the finance package agreed for Greece was broadly welcomed in Ireland. Contagion effects from the Greek debt crisis had begun to erode the gains made by the Irish government in reducing its cost of borrowing through austerity measures so steps to ameliorate the situation were viewed positively. The Taoiseach (Prime Minister) said he had “no hesitation” in signing up to the agreement.¹

Owing to the sharp deterioration in its public finances since the onset of the financial crisis, Ireland remains on the target list of what has been described as a speculators’ “wolfpack” that is currently circling the Eurozone herd. Ireland needs to borrow around 20 billion Euros annually to plug the gap in its finances. Happily, it succeeded in raising about 60 percent of its 2010 requirement before costs escalated in tandem with the Greek crisis, but any further prevarication could have proven disastrous for the Irish exchequer. In that context, expressions of European solidarity in the face of threat were gratefully received.

More recently, the Minister for Finance, Brian Lenihan, welcomed the announcement of the larger Eurozone stabilisation package on 9 May 2010, saying: “Member states are showing their resolve to support the overall European economy and the interests of all European citizens.”² The Taoiseach meanwhile acknowledged that the Greek crisis and the Eurozone agreement means that economic governance will have to be pursued much more actively in the future.

Looking beyond the immediate public debt crisis of 2010, misgivings over the Eurozone’s Stability and Growth Pact are to be found in Ireland as elsewhere. In an effort to slash the deficit, maintain a credible sovereign risk profile and renew commitment to the pact, harsh austerity measures have been taken by the government, resulting in a fiscal consolidation equivalent to 6 percent of the Gross Domestic Product since 2008. But Ireland still has a lot of cuts to implement if it is to get a deficit currently running at more than 14 percent down to the EU target of 3 percent by 2014. There is real concern that taking this much money out of the economy during a fragile recovery could have detrimental consequences. However, this concern is accompanied by the knowledge that even if the Commission decides to be lenient with Ireland on the deficit issue, the international bond markets will not. For example, former Irish European Commissioner Peter Sutherland argues that, regardless of the terms of the pact, further cuts are likely to be necessary on the basis of market confidence.³

Within Ireland, there is plenty of opposition to specific government measures, but a general sense prevails that severe belt-tightening is necessary if Ireland is to stabilise its economy and enjoy a recovery. The strongest opposition to the overall strategy in the European context has come from trade unions, some members of which have questioned why the government could not postpone the fiscal consolidation until the economy is in better health. The Greek crisis provides one answer to that question.

There is another important angle to the debt crisis from an Irish perspective, and that is the question of the Euro exchange rate. Last year, the Finance Minister, Brian Lenihan, accused the UK of a competitive devaluation of Sterling against the Euro, asserting that this was causing “immense difficulties” for Ireland.⁴ In a letter to the Financial Times, Manus O’Riordan, Chief Economist of the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), noted that in the 24 months up to October 2009, sterling had devalued by 25 percent against the Euro. “If any other member state,” he argued, “had sought to address its economic problems by slapping a de facto 25 percent tariff on imports from the rest of the EU, it would have been denounced as a rogue state.”⁵ In the context of these difficulties, John Whelan, of the Irish Exporters’ Association, says that Irish exporters would be “quietly happy” with the Euro’s recent sharp slide against the Dollar and Sterling. Ireland had 42.6 billion Euros worth of exports to the USA last year, and the shift in the exchange rate could be worth 6 billion Euros to the Irish economy.⁶ Fears of a Sterling sell-off linked to an uncertain general election outcome did not materialise, providing another boon for Irish exports.

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The idea of a strong coordination of economic policies in Europe is received ambivalently in Ireland. Despite the Taoiseach's acknowledgement that better economic governance is necessary, Ireland will be reluctant to cooperate in any measures that compromise its budgetary and fiscal sovereignty at a time of great fragility. A key issue here is sovereignty over tax issues. Ireland's low corporate tax rate is seen as both a key driver of its recent economic growth and a necessary condition of its future economic recovery. Retention of unanimity in voting on taxation policy matters was an Irish priority during negotiations on the Lisbon Treaty. That aim was fully achieved, and was reiterated in the guarantees secured by the Irish government ahead of the second referendum on 2 October 2009.⁷ Any attempt to revive discussions on a common consolidated corporate tax base is likely to be strongly resisted. The opposition Fine Gael party, traditionally a pro-European party, surprised many domestic commentators by coming out strongly against the recent Commission proposals on economic governance, saying they represented an erosion of national sovereignty and alleging that they had the potential to deny Ireland control over its corporate tax rate.

In response to this, and similar statements by the nationalist opposition party Sinn Féin,⁸ Andrea Pappin, Executive Director of European Movement Ireland, called for an informed and adult debate on the issue, saying that it "is important to clarify [...] that only an Irish government can change our corporate tax rate, no one else."⁹ Pappin and the government are right to say that there is nothing in the Commission's proposals about tax harmonisation or a common consolidated corporate tax base, but, as they stand, these proposals do mean that if the Commission and EU finance ministers do not like Ireland's budget, and the state has already cut expenditure to the quick, then the government would be forced to raise taxes.

From an Irish perspective, another key issue in any discussion about greater economic governance in the EU or in the Eurozone is: will it necessitate treaty change? Any proposal that does will meet with great concern in Ireland as there is little appetite from any quarter for further referendum campaigns (Ireland is obliged by a Supreme Court ruling to hold a referendum on any international agreement that impinges on the state's constitutional sovereignty). If the EU can continue to find ways, such as the stabilisation fund, which deepen European economic cohesion without resort to new treaties, then Ireland will probably go along with them.

On the Lisbon Strategy and its successor, the Europe 2020 Strategy, the Fine Gael party noted that "[n]ot one of the Lisbon growth strategy objectives set by the EU has been met. Accelerated fiscal consolidation and a fund to act as a safety net are undoubtedly a significant step forward, but what is missing is a European growth strategy that can make an export-led recovery credible in highly indebted countries."¹⁰ The government is supportive of the Europe 2020 Strategy, though it would like to see the agriculture and food sectors given more of an emphasis in the EU's common economic policy.¹¹ Neither one is included in EU 2020's five priority areas but both are central to Ireland's own economic plans. However, the emphasis on research and innovation in the Strategy chimes well with Ireland's own ambitions. The appointment of an Irish woman, Maire Geoghegan Quinn, as Commissioner for Research and Innovation was therefore viewed positively in Ireland.

¹ Irish Times: Cowen says he had no hesitation in signing up to pact, 27 March 2010, available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/world/2010/0327/1224267175393.html> (last access: 18 May 2010).

² Reported by RTE News: Emergency EU funds won't solve long term problems, 10 May 2010, available at: http://www.rte.ie/news/2010/0510/euro_bailout.html (last access: 10 May 2010).

³ Irish Times: Harry McGee: Ministers dismiss possibility of early budget due to Greek fiscal crisis, 10 May 2010, available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2010/0510/1224270049741.html> (last access: 10 May 2010).

⁴ Brendan Keenan: Lenihan attacks UK over slide in sterling, Irish Independent, 10 January 2010, available at: <http://www.independent.ie/national-news/lenihan-attacks-uk-over-slide-in-sterling-1597840.html> (last access: 18 May 2010).

⁵ Accessed on the SIPTU website at: <http://www.siptu.ie/PressRoom/TheEconomy/Name.11176.en.html> (last access: 18 May 2010).

⁶ Irish Times: Falling euro set to boost exports and growth, 18 May 2010, available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/finance/2010/0518/1224270601272.html> (last access: 18 May 2010).

⁷ See for example: Institute of International and European Affairs: Lisbon: The Irish Guarantees Explained, available at: <http://www.iiea.com/publications/lisbon-the-irish-guarantees-explained> (last access: 18 May 2010).

⁸ Irish Times: European Commission budget proposals deeply undemocratic, 17 May 2010, available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2010/0517/1224270548498.html> (last access: 18 May 2010).

⁹ Irish Times: European role in Irish budget, 18 May 2010, available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/letters/2010/0518/1224270596195.html> (last access: 18 May 2010).

¹⁰ Fine Gael Policy Summary, available at: <http://www.finegae.org/polcol/a/32/article> (last access: 18 May 2010).

¹¹ Irish Times: Cowen says he had no hesitation in signing up to pact, 27 March 2010, available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/world/2010/0327/1224267175393.html> (last access: 18 May 2010).

Ireland**Copenhagen to Cancun**

Shane Fitzgerald*

The general view in Ireland was that both the organisation and the outcome of the Copenhagen climate change conference was unsatisfactory. Frank McDonald of The Irish Times, among other Irish journalists, described the huge conference venue as “bedlam”.¹ The Taoiseach, Brian Cowen, expressed disappointment at the outcome, stating that “[t]he substance of the European Union’s [offers] was robustly put, but we couldn’t get the commitment of others.” He added that “we did not achieve everything we wanted, but the reality is that this is as much as can be advanced at this stage.”² The Minister for the Environment, John Gormley (Green Party), described the Copenhagen Accord itself as “underwhelming”, stating that its only advantage was that it “keeps the process alive” until the next climate change conference in Cancun in December 2010. Officials from the Minister for the Environment’s office speaking in confidence lamented the inability of the EU to present a united front at negotiations and expressed deep disappointment at the outcome. Irish charities and NGOs also expressed their dissatisfaction, with some blaming the EU’s failure to offer a 30 percent emissions reduction for the collapse of the talks. Finally, the mood among the general public varied between frustration and bemusement.

Analysis of the outcome by Joseph Curtin, climate policy specialist at the Institute of International and European Affairs, reported widely by the Irish media, identified the naivety of the EU’s approach to negotiations, the inability to effectively marshal and use all instruments at its disposal, the failure to build strategic alliances, and the lack of a central EU negotiator as key causes of the bloc’s poor performance at what was supposed to be the venue of a major display of European solidarity, vision and purpose.³

Irish attitudes

Few concrete indicators exist but anecdotal evidence and media commentary suggest that climate change scepticism and indifference may be on the rise in Ireland. Doubts about the science, already exacerbated by the recent scandals of data manipulation and misrepresentation at the University of Essex Climate Research Unit and the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, have been compounded by the “evidence” of an unusually icy winter, which has served to embolden the rhetoric of climate change sceptics.⁴

On a more positive note, after years in which Ireland lagged behind continental partners when it came to environmental awareness and policy, the current government – a coalition between the dominant party of Irish politics (the centre-right Fianna Fail) and a much smaller Green Party – is trying to prove itself in this arena, and is doing so very much by reference to its European partners. A recent renegotiation of the programme for government resulted in considerable concessions to the Green Party’s agenda and the Irish government was vocal even before Copenhagen in supporting a revision of the agreed 2020 mission’s reduction target from 20 percent to 30 percent. From an Irish perspective, the EU’s own climate change policy is generally seen as adequate, though there are of course vast differences of opinion between, for example, the environmental and the business lobbies.

One area where these two lobbies often overlap, and indeed align with government policy priorities, is in that of renewable energy. The Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Eamon Ryan (Green Party), believes that Ireland can become a renewables powerhouse in the post-2020 period by intensively developing its wind and wave resources, and could ultimately be in a position to export electricity to Europe.⁵

There is already a lot of commercial activity in this area. One example is an agreement recently signed between the Energia electricity supplier and the US-based Ocean Energy Systems, whose wave energy converter (WEC) is currently being developed off the west coast of Ireland.⁶ Ambitious plans also exist in tidal⁷ and wind⁸ energy. What these proposals for transforming Ireland’s energy infrastructure have in common is that they all depend heavily on the existence of a next generation European electricity grid connecting the continent’s electricity suppliers and consumers much more

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efficiently than has been the case until now. Irish interests will be keen to maintain a policy focus on this goal at the EU level.⁹

Joseph Curtin (of the Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA) and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland) argues for the idea that the EU should introduce a border adjustment tariff for countries which are failing to meet emissions targets. While a risk of tit-for-tat responses leading to trade protectionism does exist, such a move could prove extremely powerful as a negotiating tactic in talks with third parties over a comprehensive climate agreement. It would also demonstrate clearly that the EU is capable of transforming its economic clout into real political capital.

Ultimately, a global agreement within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) should be the objective of these negotiations. However, so-called “mini-lateral” negotiations (between the EU, the USA, Japan and the BASIC bloc of China, India, South Africa and Brazil in particular) may offer more promise initially as they are not beset by the same procedural obstacles as UN negotiations.

The failure of Copenhagen is read in Ireland as a failure of *EU* diplomacy first and foremost. More creative avenues may now have to be found. Progress made at fora such as the G20, for example, might later be presented to UNFCCC for approval. In some cases (e.g., China’s alliances with G77) partners in strategic alliances at Copenhagen which opposed the EU seemed to have little in common. The EU needs to learn from such manoeuvres by cultivating bilateral relationships with a variety of developed and developing country partners. It must also prioritise the mainstreaming of climate change objectives into its external policy instruments such as its aid, trade and energy programmes.

The Minister for the Environment has said that developing countries argued “strongly” in Copenhagen that they should not be denied development due to global climate change mitigation measures and that Ireland is willing to play its role in contributing to EU financing commitments as required. Although he personally has confirmed that he wishes Ireland’s contribution to be “additional” to existing aid commitments, the government has yet to officially confirm that this will be the case. At a time of severe budgetary tightening and uncertainty, this is a central issue for many of the Irish development and environmental NGOs active in this area.

¹ Irish Times: Climate talks venue becomes hothouse as key debate looms, 14 December 2009, available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/world/2009/12/14/1224260654343.html?via=rel> (last access: 18 May 2010).

² Reported in the Guardian: Copenhagen: The last-ditch drama that saved the deal from collapse, available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/dec/20/copenhagen-climate-global-warming> (last access: 18 May 2010).

³ Joseph Curtin: 2010. The Copenhagen Conference: How Should the EU Respond?, available at: <http://www.iiea.com/publications/the-copenhagen-conference-how-should-the-eu-respond> (last access: 18 May 2010).

⁴ See for example Frank Mc Donald: Europe must lead the way against climate scepticism, Irish Times, available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2010/03/04/1224265557823.html> (last access: 18 May 2010).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See for example siliconrepublic.com: Green Tech. Energia takes on Ireland’s wave power, 10 May 2010, available at: <http://www.siliconrepublic.com/news/article/16152/green-tech/energia-takes-on-irelands-wave-power> (last access: 18 May 2010).

⁷ See for example siliconrepublic.com: Green Tech. OpenHydro to deploy 200MW tidal energy farm off Scotland, 16 March 2010, available at: <http://www.siliconrepublic.com/news/article/15589/green-tech/openhydro-to-deploy-200mw-tidal-energy-farm-off-scotland> (last access: 18 May 2010).

⁸ See the Spirit of Ireland Website, available at: <http://www.spiritofireland.org/index.php> (last access: 18 May 2010).

⁹ See for example this presentation by Eddie O’Connor, of Mainstream Renewable Power, to the IIEA, available at: <http://www.iiea.com/events/the-european-supergird> (last access: 18 May 2010).

Ireland**New coalitions of the willing**

Shane Fitzgerald*

The former Taoiseach (Fine Gael party) and influential political and economic commentator, Garret FitzGerald, recently argued that the governance of the EU has evolved in a disturbing direction and that European Council meetings on the Greek crisis showed that the “big three” of France, Germany and the UK now dominate proceedings.¹ Meanwhile, speaking at a recent Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA) seminar on the future of European foreign policy after Lisbon, Martti Ahtisaari and Mark Leonard made the point that many traditional EU responses to crises are now off the table.² Treaty change is not an option in the current political climate. Neither will high-minded rhetoric and solemn declarations suffice. Leonard described a world where more informal relations between powers are taking the place of much of the formal architecture of global governance in which the European powers, and the EU, have traditionally done so well. And he noted that this resurgence in realpolitik was much in evidence inside the EU’s borders as well as out. Just as the global economic crisis has proven that globalisation is an asymmetric process, so too is it demonstrating that European integration is not the same for everyone.

A key point of Leonard’s was that the difference between the surging powers of the developing world and the increasingly sclerotic ones of the West was not one of capacity but one of will. The EU’s tendency towards fragmentation of policy and power has been exacerbated by the crisis even as the BRIC countries are emerging leaner and meaner. His message to the EU chimes with that of the recent Reflection Group on the Future of the European Union: reform or decline.

Talk of a two-speed Europe is often met with alarm in Ireland, which has always subscribed to the idea of a strong, treaty-based Union and would not countenance the prospect of ending up in the slipstream of a Eurosceptic UK as a core Europe forges ahead with the European project. However, there is increasing recognition of the need for new “coalitions of the willing” in order for Europe to avoid stagnation and move forward on various issues in various ways. Ireland has been understandably preoccupied with domestic problems in recent months, but as people here begin to look forward to economic recovery and political renewal, they necessarily do so in an international, and especially a European, context. There is much talk of how to leverage Irish influence abroad in the service of Irish interests, and a strong and activist role in the EU is high up the list of priorities in any conversation. The European External Action Service is a tremendous opportunity to transform European, and Irish, external relations even as the internal EU response to the crisis is creating new tensions and new synergies between member states. This shifting polarity is dangerous for Ireland insofar as it creates large structural gulfs between the Eurozone and non-Euro states, but it too affords an opportunity, this time to forge new coalitions and power blocs to counteract the dominant influence of the Commission and the “big three”. Ireland’s newfound links through migration with Poland and other central and eastern European states are just one way in which it might try to rejuvenate its role in the European project.

A smart economy strategy

Because research and innovation are at the core of José Manuel Barroso’s EU 2020 Strategy, and Ireland’s own ambition is to create a “smart economy” based on strategic investments in specific areas of science such as biopharmaceuticals and green technologies, Maire Geoghegan Quinn’s recent appointment as the Commissioner for Research and Innovation was welcomed in Ireland. Although Commissioners are prohibited from favouring projects in or seeking political advantages for their home states, it is hoped that Geoghegan Quinn’s new profile and position within the international research and innovation community will encourage Irish enterprise, academia and policymaking in subtler ways, for example by participating fully in her project of creating an “innovation Union”. Martin Schuurmans, chairman of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), for example, says that the appointment represents a tremendous opportunity for Ireland to enhance its reputation in this area and should be viewed as a major coup for the State.³ This view is generally shared in Ireland also.

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¹ Irish Times: Governance of EU has evolved in a disturbing direction, 3 April 2010, available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2010/0403/1224267608801.html> (last access: 18 May 2010).

² Video and audio podcasts of this event are available at: <http://www.iiea.com/events/europe-after-lisbon> (last access: 18 May 2010).

³ Irish Times: EU portfolio a 'coup' for Ireland, 12 February 2010, available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/finance/2010/0212/1224264265830.html> (last access: 18 May 2010).

Questionnaire for EU-27 Watch, No. 9

Reporting period December 2009 until May 2010 – Deadline for country reports 21 May

All questions refer to the position/assessment of your country's government, opposition, political parties, civil society organisations, pressure groups, press/media, and public opinion. Please name sources wherever possible!

1. Implementation of the Lisbon Treaty

On the 1 December 2009 the EU-reform ended with the entering into force of the Lisbon Treaty. However, the new treaty provisions still have to be implemented. Some procedures and conditions have to be determined. In other cases, procedures, power relations, and decision-making mechanisms will change due to the new provisions.

- How is the work of the new President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, assessed in your country? Which changes to the role of the rotating council presidency are expected?
- How is the work of the new High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, assessed in your country? Please take into particular consideration both her role within the European Commission and her relationship to the Council of the European Union.
- On 25 March 2010 a "Proposal for a Council Decision establishing the organisation and functioning of the European External Action Service" was presented. How is this concept perceived in your country? Which alternatives are discussed?
- On 31 March 2010 the European Commission presented a proposal defining the rules and procedures for the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI). What are the expectations for the ECI in your country? What are the various positions concerning the rules and procedures?

2. Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy

The European Commission has given its opinion on Iceland's application for EU-membership and a decision from the Council is expected before the end of June. Croatia seems to have settled its border dispute with Slovenia. Against this background:

- Which countries does your country expect to become members of the European Union in the next enlargement round? What are the opinions in your country on the membership of these countries?
- How are the membership perspectives of those countries discussed, which are not expected to become a member in the next enlargement round?

The Eastern Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean were the last major projects dealing with the European neighbourhood:

- How are these projects assessed in your country?

3. European economic policy and the financial and economic crisis

The European Council agreed on 25/26 March on the key elements of the Europe 2020 strategy, the successor of the Lisbon strategy. While not being on the formal agenda the economic and financial situation in Greece was discussed. The European Council agreed on a finance package combining bilateral loans from the eurozone and financing through the International Monetary Fund.

- How is the finance package for Greece assessed in your country? Are there any opinions on the process, how the agreement on the package was reached?
- Which lessons should be drawn from the Greek case for a reform of the Stability and Growth Pact?
- How is the idea of "a strong coordination of economic policies in Europe" perceived in your country? What concepts of an European economic governance are discussed in your country and which role do they assign to the Euro group?
- How is the Europe 2020 strategy discussed in your country? What are the priorities for the Europe 2020 strategy from your country's perspective?

4. Climate and energy policy

The climate conference in Copenhagen took note of the Copenhagen Accord but did not reach a binding agreement. The next conference of the parties (COP 16 & CMP 6) will take place at the end of November 2010.

- How is the Copenhagen conference assessed in your country? Please take into consideration the negotiation strategy of European Union and the results of the conference.
- Does the European Union need to change its own energy and climate policy in order to give a new impulse to the international negotiations?
- Is a global agreement within the UNFCCC the best strategy to fight climate change? If not, which alternative strategy should the European Union follow?
- What is your country's position on financing mitigation and adaptation efforts in developing countries?

5. Current issues and discourses in your country

Which other topics and discourses are highly salient in your country but not covered by this questionnaire?