

1 May 2004

Kevin McCorry, chairperson of the People's Movement, issued the following statement at a press conference held in Dublin to coincide with a meeting of EU heads of government marking the accession of ten new member states to the EU.

The People's Movement/Gluaiseacht an Phobail is a new organisation that unites a spectrum of political opinion around an alternative vision of European development to that currently being pursued by the European Union political and economic elites.

Basing ourselves on principles of democracy and self-determination, we are convinced that European co-operation requires flexible agreements, structures, and institutions that respect the diversity of Europe rather than the straitjacket that the European Union will become if the present trends go ahead unchallenged.

Our aim is to foster support for the transformation of the European Union into a treaty-based association of free and self-governing states and to campaign to win back for the peoples of the EU member states such powers as are necessary for national democracy to prosper.

The People's Movement/Gluaiseacht an Phobail is attached to no political party and opposes all forms of sectarianism, racism and sexism. We want a Europe of peoples and nations.

The present EU is the project of economic and political elites. The future Europe should allow for flexible forms of cooperation in a Europe of democracies and diversity. It should allow for opt-outs and opt-ins in a flexible fashion, based on peoples' choice. We demand that new European treaties should always be subject to referendums.

- We believe that democracy despite its shortcomings is the best form of government.
- Democracy means government of the people, by the people, for the people.
- Peoples and nations have the right to self-determination as set out in the United

Nations Charter.

- No stable democracy can exist without representative government, critical public debate and free pluralist media.
- Democracy requires that elected political leaders are accountable to voters through such discussion and through public elections.
- We believe that global solidarity is necessary to create a decent world without hunger, poverty, war and oppression.
- Respect for international law, human rights and the environment should be the main guarantee of world of peace and sustainable development.
- A balanced United Nations should play an important role in establishing a fair and sustainable world.

The claim that administrative or economic efficiency requires limits to democratic openness, control and participation should be rejected. Undemocratic decision-making procedures are never truly efficient. If they were, the world might as well revert to absolute monarchy or dictatorship!

The world as well as Europe has changed significantly during the past 50 years. The ideas that established the European Communities reflect the problems of the period after World War II and they do not correspond to contemporary understanding of democracy, civil rights and economic freedom.

We need improved democratic standards and procedures. We need strengthened civil rights and improved policies to protect the environment.

We believe that the European Union and the advocates of a EU Constitution are on the wrong path, with their ambition of creating a European Superpower with many of the features of a Federal State.

We also believe that the EU has treated the new countries in an unworthy manner by misusing its overwhelming power to dictate to them the conditions of their participation in the enlargement of the EU, and allowing no real negotiation on the substantive terms of their adherence to it. There should have been no imposition of double standards on the new countries, for example regarding the free movement of goods and workers. It is no coincidence that the present process is named 'enlargement', that is, enlargement of the West, instead of unification or co-operation.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 Europe was given a unique opportunity to create a new political and social order where all the peoples of Europe would be involved on equal

terms in the development of their States through elected parliaments and participatory democracy and close contact with political representatives. That new political and social order could have given the highest priority to solidarity, environmental concerns and the peaceful solution of conflict.

Such a pan-European vision should have been built up at that time in a collaboration involving all democratic nations in Europe that respected human rights. All European nations should have participated on equal terms with the Member States of the EU in developing this new European cooperation. At the same time, the far richer EU could have emulated the American Marshall Aid programme after World War II to assist the economic development of Eastern and Central Europe.

Instead of this, EU economic support to Eastern and Central Europe is much lower per capita today than Marshall Aid was to post-World War II Europe. In addition the EU has introduced severe trade barriers as well as other obstacles to competitive goods from Eastern and Central Europe. Partly as a consequence of this, and the requirement of immediate implementation of EU over-regulated economic policies, the overall economic development in Eastern and Central Europe has stagnated or even deteriorated during the last decade for many of the countries concerned.

Some EU common policies, which at its inception were intended to provide security and stability for the peoples of Europe, have instead become a mechanism for distorting the market with particular destructive consequences for developing countries. The Eastern and Central European countries should not be pressed into the flawed mechanism of the Common Agricultural Policy.

EU policy in relation to Eastern and Central Europe has been shortsighted and unfair. The new member countries have not even been offered the same opt-outs and derogations as some of the present EU Member States, for example as regards participation in the Monetary Union or the defence dimension of the EU. The enlargement negotiations amount in reality to little more than unilateral dictates, whereby the Applicant countries have had to accept all the basic conditions imposed by the EU.

Instead of attempting to enforce a standardised uniformity on all of Europe within a federal-style state structure in which the big EU Member States have leadership and political hegemony, the EU should have recognised that the true basis of a flourishing Europe is its cultural pluralism and diversity of values.

The EU is establishing a new Iron Curtain between those countries that are members of the

club and those outside it. What is desirable is rather a new principle of democratic flexibility that allows for a variety of forms of co-operation within Europe and beyond. The difference between true international co-operation and merging Europe's existing states and nations into a superstate or attempted super-nation is this: that the former allows for opt-outs and opt-ins as well as bilateral and multilateral cooperation, whereas the latter does not.

OUR PRINCIPAL CONCERNS REGARDING THE EU ARE:

1. The lack of democratic legitimacy of the EU

The growing gap between the EU institutions and the people of Europe and the loss of popular support for the EU is illustrated by the fact that on average only half the voters find it worthwhile to participate in elections to the EU Parliament, and by the result of some national referendums;

2. The EU's undermining of democratic nation states

The EU is undermining the democratic nation states, regions, communities and people. The EU is step by step removing powers of decision on important national issues from national governments and parliaments that are elected by and responsible to national electorates. This is a fundamental subversion of the democracy of Europe's states and nations.

3. The promotion of spurious and artificial 'European values'

In spite of Europe's cultural heritage the violent history of Europe gives us no right to claim that human rights or democratic concern, for instance, are especially characteristic of the European continent and the historical role of its dominant States around the world. This is while recognising Europe's undoubted contribution to human culture. The attempt to boost particular values as 'European' contributes also to making unfavourable distinctions between true 'Europeans' and the many immigrant people who live within Europe's borders.

4. The predominant influence of big business interests on EU policy-making

Powerful big business interests are too influential in EU policy-making and were the first advocates of such EU initiatives as the single market and the euro-currency. They are leading proponents of the EU's thrust towards economic ultra-liberalisation and privatisation of public services, steps that have been pushed by such bodies as the European Round-Table of Industrialists and UNICE, in intimate interaction with the EU Commission. The narrow view of economic development as the main policy parameter is not reflecting the welfare of people in Europe.

5. The gender imbalance of the EU

Women's political citizenship is constrained by the fact that the decision-makers in the EU institutions are predominantly male. Moreover, the EU Convention on the Future of Europe is led by a group of elderly gentlemen and fewer than one-fifth of its members are women. This appointed Convention in no way mirrors the people of Europe.

6. The lack of respect for peoples' decisions in referenda

There have been some cases where voters in EU Member States have rejected a proposed treaty in a referendum and where this rejection was subsequently manipulated into an acceptance in a further referendum.

PRINCIPLES FOR DEMOCRACIES AND DIVERSITY IN EUROPE

1. The future European cooperation should allow for opt-outs and opt-ins in a flexible fashion in a Europe of democracies and diversity. It should allow for the utmost bilateral and multilateral cooperation;
2. International or supranational regulation should only be introduced in problem areas that cannot be solved by individual States. It should be national parliaments or peoples alone that determine what powers should be exercised at international or supranational level;
3. In the future new European treaties should always be subject to referenda, and Governments and Parliaments should respect the decision of their peoples. The treaties should contain an exit clause.
4. It must be possible for the people to actively influence and shape the future of Europe from bottom up, therefore necessary instruments such as a right of initiative have to be installed at all levels.

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