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A "profound sense of foreboding"

EU commissioners have a "profound sense of foreboding" about Greece and the future of the euro zone, a leaked account of a meeting last week has suggested. The account, seen by BBC News, said that this was in reaction to the "damning failure" of euro-zone ministers to agree a new bail-out for Greece.

The writer warned that the markets would now "smell blood." The European Commission refused to comment "on anonymous interpretations of meetings." It added that any default on Greek government debt—as espoused by Germany—would leave the Greek banks insolvent and "threaten the viability of the ECB itself," which owns €49 billion of Greek bonds.

The president of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, was said to be "clearly more worried now than he was a year ago, when the sovereign debt crisis first broke." He is said to have remarked that the markets would "smell blood" at this division between the European Central Bank, which is against any form of Greek default, and Germany, which wants banks to write off some of their investments in any second bail-out.

The markets have been signalling in recent weeks that they increasingly think Greece will default on its debt, by forcing up its cost of borrowing to unsustainable levels.

This was also the case during the period before the announcement of emergency loans to Portugal and Ireland, as politicians said publicly that no bail-outs would be needed.

One ratings agency, Standard and Poor's, cut Greek sovereign debt to a CCC rating this week, its lowest rating for any country. S&P expects Greece to default in some way on its enormous debts, which now amount to almost 160 per cent of GDP.

Anybody but Cox?

The presidential hopeful Pat Cox is a member of the steering group of the elite Spinelli Group (www.spinelligroup.eu), formed to advance EU federalism, raising the question of his fitness to hold the highest office in Ireland.

The Spinelli Group, named for one of the founders of the EU, states as its aim "to make a network of those who choose the European interest above their national interest, those who want to push the federal project in their respective environment." The steering group "consists of 33 convinced and proven pro-Europeans."

The group organises the "Shadow Council," which meets simultaneously with the European Council and is the occasion for major statements calling for deepening of the federal project. Today the European Council is opting for the intergovernmental method. This is a consequence of the situation where every head of state or head of government is defending their own national interest. The Shadow Council will do the opposite.

There is also an MEP Spinelli Group. "Every MEP who is prepared to withstand the pressure of their national government and support the European interest is welcome to join this group."

Now we know why Cox wants to be President. He places EU interests above the national interest of Ireland and would "push the federal project" in that environment.

Do you think he's a suitable person to be President of Ireland?

Almunia now says bank guarantee was a mistake!

So, the Commission now thinks the controversial blanket bank guarantee issued on 29 September 2008 was a "mistake"!

But remarks by Joaquín Almunia, then EU Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs, overseeing the €70 billion rescue of Ireland's banks,

raises the question: If the bank guarantee was a mistake, isn't the EU's implacable opposition to burning bondholders also a mistake? Surely that is the only conclusion one can draw?

When asked whether Lenihan's decision was a mistake, Almunia, now Commissioner for Competition Policy, said: "Yes, indeed." He said the then Government's failure to notify the EU was "very unfortunate," and that the initiative had come as a surprise. "If I remember well, it was at the end of September 2008 when the Irish authorities—without notification here [in Brussels]—extended an unlimited guarantee to assets, also to creditors; and all those bondholders that can benefit from this unlimited guarantee, they are protected.

"He said the guarantee had limited the capacity of the state to force bondholders to absorb some of the losses . . . so the losses one way or another have ended in the public sector."

But the EU Commission's view on the bank guarantee was different a year ago. In June 2010—only one year ago—the Commission decided to extend the bank guarantee, and was fully in favour of it. "The scheme was an appropriate measure of remedying a serious disturbance in the Irish economy," the Commission said at the time.

And on 30 September 2010 Almunia welcomed statements from Brian Lenihan on plans for Allied Irish Banks and Anglo-Irish Bank. He said then that the Commission would "proceed rapidly towards taking a final decision" on state help for Anglo-Irish, and that further aid for Allied Irish would have to be notified to the Commission for approval.

The unanswered question is, Why did Lenihan not take action earlier? When he became minister, in May 2008, officials in the Department of Finance were already aware of the possibility of a banking crisis through a memo dated 24 January 2008 headed "Financial Stability Issues—Scoping Paper." This paper examined scenarios involving a banking crisis. It alluded to the vulnerability of the financial institutions to reliance on the property market and went on to suggest alternative responses the state might take to a banking crisis.

Aside from this paper there were indications, of which the Department of Finance must have been aware, that Anglo-Irish Bank was in trouble. The department was fully aware of the crisis within that bank in March that year arising from Seán Quinn's contracts for difference, because the then Minister for Finance, Brian Cowen, was contacted through department officials.

And, more critically, the department must also have been aware of the refusal of the National Treasury Management Agency to lodge substantial deposits with Anglo-Irish Bank because of apprehensions about the solvency of the bank. So, right from the beginning of his tenure, Brian Lenihan must have been made aware of the possibility of an imminent crisis in Anglo-Irish and the possibility of contagion to the other financial institutions, but did nothing about it.

ECB pushed "forced loan" to save German banks

The truth slowly emerges

The president of the European Central Bank, Jean-Claude Trichet, wrote to Brian Lenihan urging Ireland to apply for the bail-out from the EU and IMF only days before the Government announced it was applying for assistance. Sources said that Cowen was also aware of the communication, which was seen as unusual as coming directly from the ECB to a member-state government.

The letter, dated 18 November 2010, strongly urged the Government that it was essential for stability for Ireland to enter a bail-out arrangement. The *Sunday Business Post* has seen two letters that were sent to Lenihan by Trichet, one on 18 November and one the following day. The paper's request for the release of the text of the letters was refused.

The first Trichet letter came on the same day that Patrick Honohan, governor of the Central Bank of Ireland, appeared on "Morning Ireland" to say that a bail-out was essential. It is now clear that Honohan's frustration with a lack of public acceptance by the Government was shared at the highest level in the ECB, whose governing council was meeting in Frankfurt that day. The following Sunday—21 November—the Government formally conceded that it was applying for a bail-out.

The revelation that Trichet also applied pressure on the Government illustrates the central role the ECB played in the process, driven by fears of its exposure through funding the Irish banking industry.

While recent reports have said that the US Secretary of the Treasury, Tim Geithner, was an opponent of forcing losses on senior bondholders, sources say that the opposition of the ECB board was crucial, and that this was led by the president of the Bundesbank (German central bank), Axel

Weber. IMF figures show that German banks have an exposure of more than €100 billion to Irish sovereign debt and a further €100 billion in investments here, much of it in bank long-term debt.

European Semester demands deeper austerity

"We are now implementing the new system of European governance," the president of the EU Commission, José Manuel Barroso, said in Strasbourg last week, heralding the unveiling of twenty-seven detailed national prescriptions that tell member-states what they must do to "fix" their economies

But it goes much further, providing a recipe for much deeper liberalisation of the EU economies than has yet been seen. Intervening in collective bargaining, cutting wages, making it easier to fire workers, and moving away from progressive taxation, the EU Commission is using the financial crisis to foist an extreme neo-liberal economic model on member-states, with the active connivance of their governments.

The "European Semester" is a scheme for co-ordinating the economic and budgetary policies of the EU and the euro zone in line with the Stability and Growth Pact. The system works like this. In January the Commission sketches out what it expects national economic policies to adhere to for the coming period. This is then endorsed by the European Council (consisting of the members-states' heads of state or heads of government). The member-states then submit their budgets and economic plans to the Commission—*before they are submitted to national parliaments*—to see if they are sufficiently rigorous.

Then in June, the Commission gives its view of these plans, setting out what must be changed. These changes must then be endorsed by the European Council.

So, if you don't hear a peep out of Enda Kenny, then you know that he is in agreement . . . and guess what?

Over the following twelve to eighteen months, governments must put into practice all the changes ordered by the Commission duo. If countries are in the euro zone, there is the scourge of stiff fines for non-compliant governments, up to a maximum of 0.5 per cent of GDP. For Ireland, such a fine would amount to €0.7 billion.

When it announced its orders last week, the Commission strenuously denied that it was replacing national parliaments. "This is not about dictating policy . . . National governments retain responsibility for economic policies implemented in member-states. But the impact of those policies no longer stops at national borders . . . And the Commission is the only EU institution with the political autonomy, the technical expertise and the pan-European perspective to be able to oversee this process."

And then there is the give-away. "However, under the pressure of events, many of the changes needed to remedy structural weaknesses, which have often been delayed for years, are now being considered or implemented." Never waste a good crisis!

In general, the Commission's conclusion is that the economic programmes submitted by the member-states "broadly reflect" the priorities it outlined in January; but, according to Barroso, "many member-states need to show more ambition when it comes to fiscal consolidation."

The general recommendations for all states call for a review of wage-setting systems to ensure that wages keep in line with productivity in order not to undermine competitiveness. They also look to increasing the statutory retirement age throughout the EU and then automatically linking regular adjustments to this age to changes in life expectancy. Early retirement should also be phased out.

Governments should make it easier to hire and fire workers, the Commission also recommends (although the language employed is a more technocratic call to "rebalance employment protection"). Urgent action should also be taken to ease the regulation of companies, while payroll taxes should be reduced.

In a regressive measure, once again hitting those who can least afford it, Brussels has also called for taxation in general to be shifted away from labour, where the higher the income the higher the rate paid, and onto consumption, where everyone pays the same rate, regardless of income.

The recommendation for Ireland is simple: follow through on the austerity and structural adjustment imposed in return for the "forced loan."

Looking at Spain, a country that is under pressure but has not been forced to accept a bail-out, it is clear that there is not much difference between what the Spanish people will have to endure and what we ourselves will suffer, and that there is an overarching plan at the Commission level to shift the financial burden to the less well off in society.

Among the recommendations are deeper budget cuts if revenue proves worse than projected; the introduction of a "debt brake" for both national and regional governments; a warning against the parliament introducing changes to the law raising retirement age; further measures to raise the effective retirement age; an overhaul of the "unwieldy" collective bargaining system, going beyond the current labour market reforms; a move away from sectoral

bargaining to firm-by-firm bargaining; an end to the automatic extension of collective agreements; an end to wage indexation; the introduction of greater wage flexibility; and a reduction in employers' social welfare contributions. It's all depressingly familiar.

Similar measures are now being implemented here by a Government that only three months ago promised us fundamental change. But it is becoming increasingly apparent that even in the absence of the EU-IMF package and the conditions imposed by the Memorandum, they would still be willing hand-maidens of the Commission, and the poor and vulnerable would continue to become more so.

Trichet's Brave New World

A blueprint for EU financial dominance

In a speech that was not widely reported, the out-going president of the European Central Bank, Jean-Claude Trichet, spelled out the blueprint for how to establish financial oligarchy over all of Europe. He announced his plan upon receiving the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen (for services to European integration).

The debt problem called for new "monetary policy measures," he maintained. *"Countries that have not lived up to the letter or the spirit of the rules have experienced difficulties.* Via contagion, these difficulties have affected other countries in EMU [economic and monetary union]. Strengthening the rules to prevent unsound policies is therefore an urgent priority."

"Arrangements are currently in place, involving financial assistance under strict conditions, fully in line with the IMF policy. I am aware that some observers have concerns about where this leads. The line between regional solidarity and individual responsibility could become blurred if the conditionality is not rigorously complied with.

"In my view, it could be appropriate to foresee for the medium term two stages for countries in difficulty. This would naturally demand a change of the Treaty.

"As a first stage, it is justified to provide financial assistance in the context of a strong adjustment programme. It is appropriate to give countries an opportunity to put the situation right themselves and to restore stability.

"At the same time, such assistance is in the interests of the euro area as a whole, as it prevents crises spreading in a way that could cause harm to other countries. It is of paramount importance that adjustment occurs, that countries—governments and opposition—unite behind the effort, and that contributing countries survey with great care the implementation of the programme.

"But if a country is still not delivering, I think all would agree that the second stage has to be different. Would it go too far if we envisaged, at this second stage, giving euro-area authorities a much deeper and authoritative say in the formation of the country's economic policies if these go harmfully astray? A direct influence, well over and above the reinforced surveillance that is presently envisaged? . . .

"We can see before our eyes that membership of the EU, and even more so of EMU, introduces a new understanding in the way sovereignty is exerted. Interdependence means that countries *de facto* do not have complete internal authority. They can experience crises caused entirely by the unsound economic policies of others.

"With a new concept of a second stage, we would change drastically the present governance based upon the dialectics of surveillance, recommendations, and sanctions. In the present concept, all the decisions remain in the hands of the country concerned, even if the recommendations are not applied, and even if this attitude triggers major difficulties for other member-countries. *In the new concept it would be not only possible but in some cases compulsory, in a second stage for the European authorities—namely the Council on the basis of a proposal by the Commission, in liaison with the ECB—to take themselves decisions applicable in the economy concerned."*

Jean Monnet in his memoirs thirty-five years ago wrote: "In this Union of tomorrow, or of the day after tomorrow, would it be too bold, in the economic field, with a single market, a single currency and a single central bank, to envisage a ministry of finance of the Union?

"Not necessarily a ministry of finance that administers a large federal budget. But a ministry of finance that would exert direct responsibilities in at least three domains: first, the surveillance of both fiscal policies and competitiveness policies, as well as the direct responsibilities mentioned earlier as regards countries in a 'second stage' inside the euro area; second, all the typical responsibilities of the executive branches as regards the union's integrated financial sector, so as to accompany the full integration of financial services; and third, the representation of the union confederation in international financial institutions."

Ideas floated at the highest levels in the EU never go away when initially rebuffed but are recycled and, through a combination of competence creep and exploitation, reappear in a slightly different guise to become directives or agreements.

It is all part of the unremitting drive towards federalisation on the part of the EU bureaucracy.

Is this the answer to our problems?

Ireland probably has €6 trillion worth of oil lying off the west coast, it has been revealed. A report published the by Petroleum Affairs Division of the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources stated: "The potential is of at least 10 billion barrels of oil lying off the west coast of Ireland. The oil reserve is enough to pay off our national debt almost a hundred times over . . . Well data indicate world-class source rocks. Volumetric assessment and expulsion modelling shows volumes of over 130 billion barrels of oil and 50 trillion cubic feet of gas."

Most of the Irish oil and gas deposits have been pinpointed along an underwater ridge known as the Atlantic Margin, which runs parallel to our western shore. The Dunquin gas field, 200 km off the coast of Co. Kerry, contains 25 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 4,130 million barrels of oil. This alone would meet our gas needs (at present consumption levels) for the next sixty-two years.

The Dunquin field is being developed by Exxon Mobil and several other companies. The Spanish Point field, 200 km off the coast of Co. Clare, has known reserves of 1¼ trillion cubic feet of gas and 206 million barrels of oil. Further north lies the Corrib field, being developed by Shell, Marathon and Statoil and which has an estimated value of anywhere between €6 billion and €50 billion.

Inland lies in the Lough Allen basin, which is valued at €75 billion and contains 9.4 trillion cubic feet of gas and 1.5 billion barrels of oil. This vast field lies beneath Lough Allen and the foreshore area surrounding it and straddles Cos. Cavan, Leitrim, Roscommon, and Sligo. Controversy surrounds the "new technology" proposed for use in extraction, of which more below.

But transnational oil companies are likely to get all the money, unless the state renegotiates exploration contracts. The firms that "own" the Corrib gas fields will only have to pay 25 per cent on the profit, and most of this can be written off against exploration and operating costs.

Although the new rate of tax is 40 per cent, this applies only to new exploration licences and does not cover the existing oil and gas finds. In opposition, Fine Gael's spokesperson on energy and natural resources, Simon Coveney, said: "We are desperately in need of money. If we get a big find we need to make sure we get a decent return, and when you go above a certain find a different return."

Maybe now that he's a Government minister he'd consider the Norwegian model, where tax is levied at 78 per cent.

Fracking is coming our way!

The controversy over the use of hydraulic fracturing or "fracking" for the extraction of natural gas from shale that has swept the United States over recent months is about to spread to Ireland.

Throughout the United States, communities are protesting against the danger of serious water pollution from a range of dangerous chemicals used in the process In France the practice has been suspended as a result of similar protests against the onshore gas exploration companies.

Following the award of licences to companies seeking to explore for natural gas in the Lough Allen Basin, which includes Cos. Leitrim, Roscommon and Sligo and parts of Cos. Donegal, Cavan, and Fermanagh, there have been growing calls for a ban on the use of "fracking" to extract any finds of natural gas. The Lough Allen Natural Gas Company seeks to extract gas from shale in what is known as the North-West Carboniferous Basin. The company believes there may be up to 10 trillion cubic feet of gas in three sandstone reservoirs in the area. An Australian company, Tamboran Resources Pty Ltd, has also been given a licence to explore for gas onshore.

Over recent weeks an award-winning American documentary, *Gasland,* has been shown at various places around the Lough Allen Basin. It shows how communities throughout the United States have reacted to the damaging effects on their lives of the hydraulic fracturing process, which was exempted from environmental protection laws by the Bush government in 2005.

Major energy companies in the United States are conducting the largest domestic natural gas drilling campaign in history. *Gasland* shows that this new form of drilling, pioneered by Halliburton, is harmful to the environment and threatens to permanently contaminate the water supply, drastically pollute the air, and despoil huge areas. It also shows how the tap water in houses near drilling sites can be set on fire right out of the tap, and how chronically ill local residents showed the same mysterious symptoms.

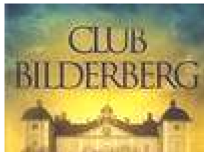
Gasland lists the known carcinogens, including mercury and strontium, that are used in the "frack-

ing" process. The film reveals how huge pools of toxic waste arising from the drilling activity have killed cattle and vegetation, and how blow-outs and gas explosions have been consistently covered up by regulatory agencies.

The communities around Lough Allen that would be affected by these shale-gas explorations have heard very little from the companies about their plans for onshore drilling, other than confirmation from Tamboran that it will use fracking if and when it drills for gas.

■ We have obtained copies of the film and will arrange a screening shortly.

Competition commissioners and the Bilderberg Group



This year's Bilderberg conference took place in St. Moritz, Switzerland, from 9 to 12 June. Herman van Rompuy was there, *en route* to Ireland, along with two former commissioners, Peter Mandelson and Mario Monti. Two serving commissioners, Joaquín Almunia and Neelie Kroes, also attended, just as they did in 2010. Kroes was at Bilderberg in 2009 as well.

One of the topics for discussion was "social networks: connectivity and security issues." Kroes is EU Commissioner for Digital Agenda. This must have been of interest to Chris Hughes, joint founder of Facebook, and to Eric Schmidt and Reid Hoffman, executive chairmen of Google and Linked-In, respectively. No doubt any discussion that may have taken place between them and Kroes steered well clear of her regulatory role.

Meanwhile Almunia, now Commissioner for Competition Policy, was able to rub shoulders with the top executives of Airbus, Shell, and Siemens. Almunia's impartiality was hardly dented by any discussions he may or may not have had with these industry leaders.

What is it, though, with competition commissioners and Bilderberg, one wonders? The present and previous two holders of that post—Almunia, Kroes, and Monti—were all at St Moritz. It must be the invigorating air!

What were these people up to?

A leaked list of those attending the Bilderberg meeting, published on a number of web sites, shows three former Irish Attorney-Generals as being present: Paul Gallagher, Michael McDowell, and Peter Sutherland. If they were there, could they possibly be discussing the European Stability Mechanism and in particular the avoidance of a referendum? Paul Gallagher will deliver a lecture on the subject of the ESM and a referendum in the Law Library, Four Courts, Dublin, on Wednesday 29 June at 4:30 p.m.

German CSU demands transfer of powers back to member-states

Alexander Dobrindt, secretary-general of the Christian Social Union (the Bavarian sister-party of Angela Merkel's CDU), has published a memorandum in response to the proposal by the president of the European Central Bank, Jean-Claude Trichet, to set up a single EU finance ministry. He argues in favour of transferring powers back to Germany from the EU, stating that "we should stop the automaticity by which Brussels constantly gains more power."

He also criticises the role of the ECB in the euro-zone crisis. "It should be questioned whether the purchasing of government bonds is in line with the legal statute of the ECB."

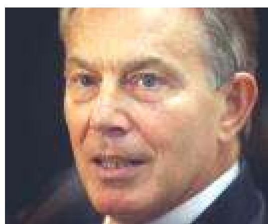
Meanwhile the EU Commissioner for the Internal Market, Michel Barnier, has added fuel to the fire, saying that it is necessary to "go further in creating a unique post of European Finance Minister."

Expressing his "serious concerns regarding the course of action the Commission took during the European Semester," the Hungarian Minister of the National Economy, György Matolcsy, said that Hungary "had provided the opportunity to the Commission services to have an open and frank dialogue regarding the details of the programmes. Unfortunately, the Commission services did not grasp this opportunity."

The Commission's recommendations were published only on 7 June, leaving insufficient time for experts and policy-makers to review them before the EU Council at the end of the month, Matolcsy said. He concluded that as a result of these "shortcomings" in the Hungarian case, a review of the entire system "may be deemed necessary."

Spain, France and Denmark also criticised the Commission's recommendations for their economies, although not formally.

And Blair pushes out the boat



The former British prime minister Tony Blair has said the European Union must have an elected leader to give it the "clear leadership" to deal with rising powers, such as China.

"The rationale for Europe now is power, not peace," he told the *Times* (London), adding, amazingly, that European citizens were willing to support this new direction for the European project. "The crucial thing is to understand that the only way that you will get support for Europe today is not on the basis of a sort of post-war view that the EU is necessary for peace. For my children's generation, that is just a bizarre argument. They don't see that as a real threat.

"What they can understand completely is that in a world in particular in which China is going to become the dominant power of the twenty-first century, it is sensible for Europe to combine together, to use its collective weight in order to achieve influence."

British prepare for the fall of the euro!

EU Observer reports that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Danny Alexander, has admitted that the British government is preparing for a potential break-up of the euro zone.

He began by saying: "I am not going to engage in speculation on what might or might not happen . . . Members will agree that it would not be appropriate for me to discuss the detail of those scenarios."

Responding to a question about the possible "domino effect" of a Greek bankruptcy, he later admitted: "Discussions are taking place between the Bank of England, the Treasury and the FSA [Financial Services Authority], and we are considering a number of scenarios and potential market events."

If Greece goes bust, British banks will lose $4 billion (€2.8 billion) in sovereign bonds, French banks $16 billion, and German banks $20 billion. But the Labour MP Jack Straw noted that if all forms of debt are included, British banks would lose €13 billion, French ones €34 billion, and German ones €53 billion.

Poll round-up

A recent opinion poll in Norway has revealed that 66 per cent are against EU membership, with only 26 per cent in favour. Opposition to EU membership is highest among people under thirty, with 77 per cent against and only 15 per cent in favour.

Meanwhile Croatians will vote in a referendum in the autumn on EU membership. Opinion polls shows 52 per cent in favour while 40 per cent oppose it.

A new opinion poll conducted by Sweden's Statistics Bureau has shown that 64 per cent of Swedes are opposed to their country joining the euro, up from 60 per cent last year.

Second Greek bail-out will see almost two-thirds of Greek debt owned by taxpayers by 2014

With EU leaders scrambling to come up with a solution to the raging Greek and euro-zone debt crisis, *Open Europe* has published a briefing that argues that a second Greek bail-out package would only increase the political and economic cost of the crisis, without providing any real solutions.

Considering Greece's poor growth prospects and increasing debt burden, the country is likely to default within the next few years, even if it gets some breathing space through a second bail-out. EU leaders should instead be planning for how such a default could be managed in as orderly a manner possible.

Crucially, the cost of a Greek default to the European economy will only increase with time. Most importantly, through the bail-outs, so-called official-sector (taxpayer-backed) loans are gradually replacing private-sector loans. It is estimated that today each household in the euro zone underwrites €535 in Greek debt (through loan guarantees). By 2014, however, and following a second bail-out, this will have increased to a staggering €1,450 per household. The cost to European taxpayers of what looks like an inevitable Greek default will therefore increase radically in the next few years, making a second bail-out far more contentious than any of the previous euro-zone rescue packages.

"A second Greek bail-out is almost certain to result in outright losses for taxpayers further down the road, because, even with the help of additional

money, Greece remains likely to default within the next few years. Another bail-out will also increase the cost of a Greek default, transferring a far bigger chunk of the burden from private investors to taxpayers."

■ Read the full briefing at www.openeurope.org.uk/research/greece2ndbailout.pdf.

Wealth—maybe it could be used to solve some of our problems?

The issue of wealth in Ireland is certainly hotting up. Recently we had a strong intervention by Fintan O'Toole, claiming that Ireland is an extremely wealth country, a claim that contradicts the austerity narrative we are being subject to. A few days later Dan O'Brien claimed that Ireland was never wealthy and that Irish wealth lags behind its western European peers. So who are we to believe?

Financial wealth is made up primarily of cash, shares and equity, and pension and insurance funds. It does not include houses or land. It does not measure income.

When you go to the data, the striking thing is that Ireland has one of the highest levels of financial wealth per capita in the EU, and even higher levels of wealth per adult.

EU fish in numbers

72 per cent of the EU's fish stocks are believed to be overexploited, compared with 32 per cent in the world as a whole.

20 per cent of EU fisheries are being plundered so intensively that the stock could die out.

17 kg per person per year is the world average consumption of fish. In Europe it is 22.2kg.

42 per cent of the world's fish imports were bought by Europe in 2008—at a cost of €31 billion.

30 per cent is the cut in the European bluefin tuna quota since 2006, in response to shortages in the Mediterranean.

A "reverse Robin Hood" programme

Senator John Crown's take on the "bail-out"

Speaking in the Seanad last week, Prof. John Crown said: "We have heard much about the primacy of education in developing the 'smart economy,' and at the same time we have heard of the inevitable decline in spending and resourcing which will occur as a result of our bizarre decision to conduct this unprecedented massive reverse Robin Hood foreign-aid programme from some of the poorest people in our society to the some of the richest people in Europe, who were foolish enough to think that Irish real estate was a clever way for them to spend the money over which they had fiduciary responsibility."

Indeed!

Loss of economic sovereignty—the reality?

In the *Irish Independent* on 16 June, Lise Hand writes that, after the EU-IMF bail-out was agreed, "it was game over for our economic sovereignty. And now look. The new household names are Trichet and Rehn and van Rompuy and Barroso and Lagarde and Merkel, and all we want to do is crawl out of the doghouse and get tossed a couple of concessionary bones for being good little doggies."