



Houses of the
Oireachtas
Tithe an Oireachtais

Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

Committee Travel to Berlin

30 June - 2 July 2015

Report of the Delegation

1. **Background**

As part of its 2016 work programme, the Joint Committee agreed that a parliamentary delegation would undertake travel to the German Bundestag, Berlin, to discuss mutual matters of interest, in particular the UK/EU question, in line with the inter-parliamentary co-operation aspect of its remit under the Committee Orders of Reference. The Joint Committee wishes to express its gratitude to the Irish Ambassador to Germany, Mr. Michael Collins and to his staff for their assistance in relation to this visit and to all the stakeholders who met with the delegation, while in Berlin.

2. **Objective**

The objective of this visit was to discuss the following issues with relevant stakeholders:–

- ◆ the EU-UK relationship (commonly referred to as “Brexit”) and EU Reform, to discuss the findings in the Joint Committee report on this issue;
- ◆ Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership agreement (TTIP);
- ◆ the role of national Parliaments generally;
- ◆ the European Semester;
- ◆ the migration crisis in the Mediterranean;
- ◆ the ongoing economic situation in Greece; and
- ◆ other issues based on the work of the Committee.

3. In total the Committee delegation attended 6 meetings (*reference Annex 1 for full programme*).

Summary of Meetings Held

30th June 2015

4. Informal meeting with Irish Ambassador to Germany, His Excellency Mr. Michael Collins

An informal meeting was held with Ambassador Michael Collins and Deputy Head of Mission, Mr Brian Flynn for purposes of briefing the delegation in advance of meetings with stakeholders. Ambassador Collins briefed the delegation based on the programme of meeting scheduled and informed the delegation of topical issues that could arise in the course of meetings.

1st July 2015

5. Meeting with various German-based “Think-tanks”

The Committee delegation met with representatives from various German-based think tanks. In attendance for the “Think-tanks” were:-

- Ms. Daniela Schwarzer, Senior Director for Research and Director of the Europe Program at the German Marshall Fund;
- Dr. Ulrich Schoof, Senior Project Manager, Bertelsmann Foundation;
- Dr. Nicolai von Ondarza, Deputy Head of Research, EU/Europe Division, German Institute for International & Security Affairs; and
- Mr Julian Rappold, Program Officer, Alfred von Oppenheim Centre for European Policy Studies.

The discussion was wide-ranging. It provided the Committee delegation with an overview of German attitudes/thinking on the migration crisis in the Mediterranean; the UK/EU relationship and the possibility of a ‘Brexit’; TTIP; the Greek crisis; and the rise of changing attitudes towards the EU.

On the UK question, the representatives spoke about the German desire for the UK to remain in the EU. The Chairman highlighted the extreme importance to Ireland of the UK question. He outlined the Committee’s report on the implications for Ireland, if the UK did leave the EU. He detailed the Committee’s wide consultations with stakeholders and witnesses at Committee on the issue. He outlined the main concerns, namely the potential of trade interruption between UK and Ireland (major trading partners), the

potential interruption in freedom of movement between Ireland and the UK, as traditionally Irish/UK citizens enjoy reciprocal freedom of movement between jurisdiction and he outlined the negative impacts on the fragile peace process in Northern Ireland, including the possible imposition of an external EU border in Ireland between North and South.

The Greek crisis was also discussed at some length with some representatives suggesting a hardening of the German attitude towards a Greek exit, with leading economists suggesting that it would be easier for Greece to fix its problems on the outside of the Euro. Others suggested that 'Grexit' could be the trigger providing the impetus needed to drive fundamental changes in the EU.

6. **Meeting with Bundestag Committee on European Affairs**

The Committee delegation met with members of the Bundestag Committee on European Affairs. Chairman of the Bundestag Committee, Mr. Günther Krichbaum welcomed the delegation and spoke about the good cooperation between the Irish and German committees. The discussion initially focused on the Greek crisis and how the current situation is the foremost issue facing the EU. The proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership agreement (TTIP) was then discussed. Mr. Krichbaum explained that while TTIP is a contentious issue in Germany, he believes that the EU as a whole will benefit from concluding this agreement with the US. Some discussion on the ratification process and the role of national Parliaments also took place.

In relation to the UK question, members of the Bundestag committee outlined their views on the question. They see the UK as an ally within the EU, in particular in areas such as defence policy. However, the renegotiation of the Treaties could be seen as a free for all however could also lead to constructive change being achieved.

Mr. Hannigan, highlighted the extreme importance to Ireland of the UK question. He outlined the Committee's report on the implications for Ireland, if the UK did leave the EU. He detailed the Committee's wide consultations with stakeholders and witnesses at Committee on the issue. He outlined the main concerns, namely the potential of trade interruption between UK and Ireland (major trading partners), the potential interruption in freedom of movement between Ireland and the UK, as traditionally Irish/UK citizens

enjoy reciprocal freedom of movement between jurisdictions and also he outlined the negative impacts on the fragile peace process in Northern Ireland, including the possible imposition of an external EU border in Ireland between North and South.

7. **Meeting with German – Irish Parliamentary Friendship Group**

The delegation met with Ms. Brigit Kompel, Chair of the Irish Parliamentary Friendship Group. During this meeting, an exchange of views on the Greek crisis, social housing and education took place.

8. **Meeting with German Government Representatives**

Members met with government officials from the German Finance Ministry, the Economy Ministry and the Federal Foreign Office.

Members engaged with the officials on a range of topics which assisted members in gaining an insight into German government policy on various topics. In particular, officials outlined their views on the UK/EU question. Again, the message was clear, Germany would like the UK to remain a member of the EU. The German side stated that Germany will constructively engage with the UK but all member states need to be involved. Their views were that an EU without the UK would be weaker. As he had done at previous meetings, the Chairman spoke about the Joint Committee's report on the implications for Ireland of a UK exit from the EU. He outlined how Ireland's unique status with the UK must be taken into consideration and that our views and interests must be acknowledged.

In relation to the Greek crisis, officials outlined their views on the many problems facing Greece such as institutional and economic problems.

On TTIP, the discussions focused on the anti-TTIP movement in Germany and its impact in influencing German public opinion on the proposed deal. The ratification process by national Parliament was also discussed.

9. **Meeting with members of the Irish Business Network**

Members met with Ms. Jody Gannon and Mr. Colin Manning of the Irish Business Network. The discussion centred on the opportunities available to Irish entrepreneurs in

Germany and also the challenges they face in making the move and exploiting these opportunities.

2nd July 2015

10. Meeting with members of the Bundestag Committee on Budgetary Affairs

The Committee delegation met with members of the Bundestag Committee on Budgetary Affairs to discuss topics of mutual interest. Chair of the Bundestag Committee, Ms. Lobtsch outlined to the members the work carried out by it and in particular how the committee is responsible for deciding whether money is disbursed.

Members of the Bundestag Committee expressed their admiration for Ireland in the way in which it had dealt with the economic crisis. Discussion then moved to the Greek crisis.

TTIP was also discussed. Members of the Bundestag Committee referred to the fact that the proposed TTIP agreement has generated many different views there, with some concerns in Germany around food safety, agriculture and private arbitration.

On the UK/EU question, Mr. Hannigan informed the German side of his Committee's report on the implications for Ireland of a UK exit from the EU. He reiterated the importance for Ireland and the EU of keeping the UK in the EU. In particular he pointed to the economic interdependence between Ireland and the UK and stated that this issue is a very real concern for Ireland.



Dominic Hannigan, TD
Chairman

24 September 2015.

Annex 1 – Berlin Programme

Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

1-2 July 2015

Tuesday, 30 June

17:35 Arrive: Berlin, Schönefeld
Greeted by: Brian Flynn, Embassy
Transfer to Hotel
Informal briefing with Irish Ambassador to Germany, Mr Michael Collins

Wednesday, 1 July

09:30 Roundtable discussion with think tank experts
Venue: Embassy of Ireland, Jägerstr. 51, 10717

10:45 Depart Embassy for Bundestag

11:00 Meeting with Bundestag Committee on European Affairs
Venue: Bundestag (Room TBC)

12:30 Meeting concludes

13:00 Meeting with members of the German-Irish Parliamentary Friendship Group
Venue: Bedienrestaurant im Jakob-Kaiser-Haus

14:30 Depart Bundestag for Embassy

15:00 Meeting with Government representatives at Embassy
Venue: Embassy of Ireland, Jägerstr. 51, 10717

17:00 Meeting with members of the Irish Business Network
Venue: Embassy of Ireland, Jägerstr. 51, 10717

18:00 Depart Embassy for Hotel

Thursday, 2 July

09:15 Depart Hotel for Reichstag

09:30 Tour of the Reichstag
Entrance: Paul-Löbe-Haus Süd (Paul-Löbe-Allee 2)

11:00 Meeting with members of the Bundestag Committee on Budgetary Affairs
Venue: Bundestag, Room PLH 2.400

12:30 Depart Bundestag

15:30 Transfer to airport

18:00 Depart Berlin Schönefeld for Dublin