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Ireland and Germany - 50 Years on. Limerick: Centre for Irish-German Studies and the Centre for European Studies at the University of Limerick in co-operation with the DAAD, 02.09.1999-04.09.1999.

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Ireland and Germany - 50 Years on

2nd Limerick Conference in Irish-German Studies

Session 1 - Constitutions

The session on the German and Irish Constitutions was chaired by His Excellency Hartmut Hillgenberg, German ambassador to Ireland. The first speaker, The Hon. Mrs. Justice Susan Denham, Judge of the Supreme Court of Ireland, discussed some of the major aspects of the Constitution of Ireland, 1937 and noted its success in providing the framework for a modern democracy in Ireland. The new philosophical approach, the change from parliamentary sovereignty, was analysed with special reference to Articles 26 and 34.3.2 of the Constitution. The fundamental rights established under the Constitution were described. She spoke of the special place of the family under the Constitution. Reference was made to the recognition in Article 41.2.1 that by her life within the home woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.

Thomas Oppermann, emeritus Professor of Constitutional, International and EU Law at Eberhard Karls-Universitaet Tuebingen compared the German constitution of 1949 ("Grundgesetz") with the constitution of Ireland of 1937. Similarities are reflected, according to Professor Oppermann, in references to division and unity of the two countries, openness to the ideas of European integration and international co-operation, a bi-cameral parliament with preponderance of the first house, the same basic human rights and similar guiding principles of the economy. Differences can be seen in the direct election of the President in Ireland, Germany's federalism and in some areas of basic rights mainly in the fields of family life and religion. Professor Oppermann sees challenges to the German constitution in the full realization of reunification between Eastern and Western Germany ("innere Wiedervereinigung"); the need to reform nationality laws in order to integrate a large number of long-standing immigrants and their children in Germany; the need to include the population more in the political process ("direct democracy") and to ensure democracy within political parties; the necessity to foster a "lean state" by deregulation and privatization. On the whole, he believes Germans are optimistic that the constitution of 1949 will meet the challenges of the 21st century.

In his paper, "Politics and the Constitution in Germany and Ireland", John Coakley, lecturer in Political Science at U.C.D, noted that the present Irish constitution of 1937 essentially constitutes a development of its predecessor of 1922, whereas the German constitution represents in many respects a reaction to the Weimar constitution of 1919. Both constitutions provide comprehensively for the defence of human rights, for the parliamentary rather than the presidential system of government, with the President's role being symbolic, and are unusual in that they are bi-cameral (overall, two thirds of all the world's parliaments have a single chamber). But there are more fundamental points of contrast. A very obvious one includes the fact that Germany is a federal state, whereas Ireland has no federal element and even local government is weak. But this reflects the very different paths of historical development of the two countries, and other differences in such areas as political culture and the sheer scale of the political system. The German constitution is more "modern" than the Irish one, in that it gives formal recognition to the political party, rather than simply seeing the individual as the basic political actor. The process of constitutional amendment is different also: in Ireland the constitution can only be amended by referendum; in Germany amendments are made by a two-thirds majority of the Bundestag and Bundesrat.

Session 2 - Experiences of Division and Unification

This session on the two nations' respective experiences of division and unification was chaired by Nicholas Rees, Head of the Department of Government and Society at the University of Limerick.

Wolf Wagner, Professor of Social Science at the Fachhochschule Erfurt, introduced the audience to the theoretical model he has developed to explain and describe the multiple cultural and social adjustments taking place in East (and West) German society in the wake of unification. Wagner argued that, initially the often troublesome encounters between members of the two societies could be described best as a "cultural shock" phenomenon, as set forth first in Oberg's pertinent study. This initial phase of "cultural shock" had been effected by the radical and sudden introduction of the West German political and economic system in the East. Wagner maintained, however, that German society has meanwhile entered another phase of "cultural shock", one that is characterized by everyday cultural differences between East and West Germans, and that it is compounded by the ongoing devaluation of East Germany in comparison with West Germany as well as East Germans' continuous experience of being 'excluded'. Wagner's new "cultural shock" model therefore includes Norbert Elias's and Pierre Bourdieu's findings on social change and cultural and economic prestige. Based on the results of his 1998 nationwide empirical survey, Wagner concluded that the cultural change taking place in Germany today will gradually overcome East-West differences; only where opportunities for upward mobility and social participation are denied will people retreat into enclosed social and cultural segments - a process that applies to both East and West.

The other speaker in this session was Richard Sinnott, Lecturer in Politics and Director of the Centre for European Economic and Public Affairs at University College, Dublin. Based on surveys and polls conducted in Northern Ireland and the Republic, both before and after the Good Friday Agreement and the referenda held in 1998, Sinnott illustrated changes in opinion and attitudes with regard to national and political aspirations in different segments of society North and South of the Border.

Session 3 - Ireland, Germany and the European Union

The session was chaired and introduced by Carl Lankowski, Research Director of the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, Washington DC. The speakers were Willie Paterson, OBE, Director of the Institute for German Studies, University of Birmingham and Garret Fitzgerald TD, former Taoiseach and Foreign Minister. W Paterson surveyed the experience of Germany as a member of the EC/EU making the point that, at the start, Germany saw its role as a dutiful EC member (Musterknabe) in order to convince its neighbours (and especially France) that its democratic credentials and external ambitions were not to be feared. Although, later, in a time of economic success and political self-confidence, Chancellor Kohl was to reassure his neighbours similarly that Germany sought a "European Germany and not a German Europe" there had already been a distinct shift of emphasis in Germany's 'European policy': it had become much more reluctant to 'foot the bill' for its neighbours' economic problems or to underwrite new Community policies; and in external affairs, it was more prone to follow policies of self interest in Eastern Europe, for example, albeit under the cloak of common European projects.

G Fitzgerald, TD provided the counterbalancing analysis of Ireland's experience in the European Union. Like Germany, although for different reasons, Ireland had used its membership of the EU to carve out a distinct sovereign identity separate from that of its neigbours; secondly, membership had contributed greatly to the country's prosperity and in no small part to the current "Celtic Tiger" status. Thirdly, it could be argued that Ireland had on several occasions "punched above its weight" in EU diplomacy if only because its statesmen, and the solutions they proposed carried no stigma of neocolonialism or "great power" self-interest. Finally, Ireland's neutrality, formerly unique, had blended effectively with the entry of the EFTA countries in 1995 who, with Ireland, had helped to define a new security posture for the EU based on post-Cold War assumptions about security in Europe.

Session 4 - The Celtic Tiger - An Irish Wirtschaftswunder?

Session 4 on "The Celtic Tiger - An Irish Wirtschaftswunder" was chaired by Nigel Reeves, Aston University. The first speaker, Werner Abelshauser, Professor of Economic History at the University of Bielefeld, concentrated in his paper on the German Wirtschaftswunder and its background. After a short introduction into the history of the term 'Wirtschaftswunder' he went on to examine the circumstances which led to the situation commonly seen as an economic miracle in the 1950s. Abelshauser maintained that the real impact was most likely made by the continuity and reconstruction of the German social system of production. He put less emphasis on other commonly cited factors such as the Marshall Plan, the acceptance of Germany due to the desire to stabilise Western Europe in the Cold War era and technical innovation. He concluded that despite superficial similarities between the 'Wirtschaftswunder' and the Celtic Tiger economy, such as the importance

of foreign aid or deep changes in economic structures (which in his opinion didn't really take place in Germany after the Second World War), any possible parallels with the Celtic Tiger could only be found in Germany around the turn of the last Century after the 1890s Depression.

James Wrynn, Senior Lecturer in Business Policy at the Dublin Institute of Technology, spoke about the Irish side. He compared the Irish economic performance from 1913 to other European countries and pointed out that the success of the Irish economy developed especially in the 1990s. He argued that despite the expected ongoing existence of contributing factors such as low corporate tax, the English language environment and the national partnership model, Ireland remained vulnerable and depended on external investment and could not be seen as a suitable model for other European countries. He concluded that Ireland is experiencing a rapidly growing economy, which is significantly externally driven. Due to its leaning towards the Anglo-American variant of capitalism Wrynn saw Ireland as being reluctant to take a visionary approach towards the construction of a more egalitarian society.

Session 5 - Multiculturalism?

The session on Multiculturalism was chaired by Marion Caspers-Merk, MdB and included contributions from an Irish and a German politician. Senator Brendan Ryan addressed the issue of refugees and asylum seekers in the Irish context. He criticized the perception that working-class people in Ireland are to be blamed for the problem of racial prejudice. According to Senator Ryan, one section of the population should not be used as a scapegoat in trying to come to terms with our attitudes towards foreigners as a nation. He argued that we should seek to understand the fundamental sources of the xenophobic attitudes of some working-class people, rather than simply attributing it to racial prejudice per se. Senator Ryan believes that social problems such as housing, low pay and social exclusion constitute the real source of much of the sense of grievance of Irish people, who see the influx of asylum seekers as a threat. These grievances must be addressed by society in tandem with a refugee policy, and not simply dismissed. However, Senator Ryan sees the attitude of the Irish Government and Department of Justice towards asylum seekers as unacceptable and inhumane. Our criticism of racism should, in his view, be directed towards the state, whose policy on asylum seekers and on social problems in this country in general is totally inadequate.

Adil Oyan, executive member of "ImmiGruen - Buendnis der neuen InlaenderInnen," spoke about multiculturalism in Germany. He discussed changes in attitude among the second-generation immigrant population in Germany. For many there is an increasing tendency to work towards integration and reconciliation with their adopted home; others, however, are returning to the politics of religious and ethnic identity, which poses a challenge, in his view, to the younger generation of immigrants. He also spoke about the problem of racist violence in Germany but believes the democratic foundation of German society is solid. He believes that a pluralist, multicultural society needs some common values, which all groups can agree on and that fundamental human and social rights could form the basis of such a consensus. The full integration of Germany's immigrant population is a major priority on the Green Party's agenda, currently a member of the ruling coalition with the Social Democrats. Some of the specific measures in achieving this objective include implementation of anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation; support for the process of European Union harmonization of migration and asylum policy; and reform of Germany's naturalization law. This reform will enable over 4 million "foreigners"- most of whom were born in Germany or have lived in Germany for more than 8 years to become citizens of the Federal Republic. From 1. January 2000 every child who is born in Germany one of whose foreign parents is a legal resident in Germany for at least 8 years will get German citizenship automatically. When they reach the age of 23 those concerned will have to decide whether they will keep German citizenship or the citizenship of their parents.

Session 6 - The Role of Women in Comparative Perspective

The session on the role of women in comparative perspective was chaired by Pat O'Connor, Professor of Sociology at the University of Limerick. The first speaker, Ursula Mueller, the Director of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Women's Research at the University of Bielefeld, stressed in her paper the changes in the position of women in society over the last 50 years. She showed important developments and trends in the situation of women by presenting a broad range of statistical materials. In this way, she compared the situation of women across Europe in areas like female representation in Parliament and in different political parties, participation in the labour market, marriage and fertility rates, age of first maternity and provisions for birth control. Differences between Ireland and Germany as well as between the Federal Republic and the GDR were pointed out also.

Ailbhe Smyth, the Director of the Centre for Women's Studies at University College Dublin, took a different approach and gave an impressive paper that in many ways was complementary to that of the first speaker. She used personal experiences as a starting point to discuss developments in the role of women in Irish society, thus demonstrating convincingly the validity of the classic feminist motto that the personal is political. She pointed out the discrepancies between growing visibility of women in public life on the one hand and the phenomenon of 'token-women' on the other hand. She also spoke about attitudes in Ireland towards divorce and abortion. In conclusion, she took a critical stance on the concept of post-feminism and argued that the struggle for women's rights was still ongoing.

Session 7 - Recent Developments in 3rd Level Education

Chaired by Ina Grieb, Vice President of the Carl-von-Ossietzki-University Oldenburg, this session attempted to compare and contrast recent developments in third level education in Ireland and Germany. Áine Hyland, Prof of Education at University College Cork (NUI Cork), placed the university sector within the overall framework of Irish education. She pointed at the continuing low participation rate among children from economically disadvantaged groups in third level education and showed that the problem can only be tackled by a concerted effort at primary, secondary and tertiary level.

Josef Lange, Secretary of the Association of Heads of Universities and other Higher Education Institutions in Germany (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz), focussed on recent changes in third level education in Germany. Among the most far-reaching ones in his view was the gradual introduction of the Bachelor's degree which brings Germany into line with international practice. It also allows students to leave universities earlier. The debate showed that this change is still a hotly debated issue in the German university sector.

Session 8 - Cultural and Academic Connections

This session was chaired by Colin Townsend, Dean of the College of Humanities at the University of Limerick. The two ways of approaching the topic in this session were quite different from each other. While Emer O'Sullivan and Dietmar Roesler talked about the peculiarities of an academic career in Germany, Arndt Wigger picked out the continued existence of a - partly German - academic construct as his central theme: the Celticity of the Irish.

Emer O'Sullivan, Privatdozentin at the Institute for Children's Literature Research of the University of Frankfurt am Main, and Dietmar Roesler, Professor of German as a Foreign Language at Giessen University, both drew from their own biographical experiences at Irish, British and German universities when they explained that somebody embarking on an academic career in Germany often encounters more obstacles and usually takes longer to reach the top of the ladder, i.e. become a professor, than their counterpart in Ireland. In Germany, it is not unusual for a young lecturer to be dependent on the professor to whom s/he is associated until his/her late thirties or even early forties. Only someone holding a chair is largely independent in his/her work. This is partly due to the Habilitation, a postdoctoral thesis required for qualifying as a professor. In Ireland, a young lecturer can usually work quite independently from his/her late twenties on. This is also the age at which young academics get their first permanent job in Ireland. In Germany, however, their counterparts may have to do with a series of five-year contracts until they reach their late thirties as there are generally fewer permanent jobs available at German universities nowadays. Fully qualified at the age of 40 or older, the dilemma is then that if the academic does not manage to get one of the rare posts as a professor, his/her chances of getting a job outside academia are slim.

In the second paper, Arndt Wigger, Lecturer in Linguistics at the University of Wuppertal, explained that the concept of the Irish, the Welsh, the Scottish and the Bretons being Celtic has its origin in 19th century philology. Scholars, among them many Germans such as Caspar Zeuss and Franz Bopp, defined these languages as being derived from an original Celtic language. From the theoretical point of view of mainstream Historical Linguistcs, contemporary populations who speak a Celtic language are considered to be Celtic. Nowadays, the term Celtic has several meanings. In linguistics it defines languages which share certain characteristics, in Archaeology it describes artefacts. In popular usage in Ireland, Germany and elsewhere, the term Celtic is used to describe what is perceived as shared cultural characteristics of Ireland, Scotland, the Isle of Man, Wales, Cornwall and Brittany. Arndt Wigger argued that the latter meaning of the word, while not scientifically acceptable, may however be accepted as a popular contemporary concept.

Session 9 - The Future of Irish-German Cultural Relations.

A Round Table Discussion

Chaired by Erich Thies, Secretary General of the German Conference of Ministers of Culture and Education

(Kultusministerkonferenz), the session had the function of summing up the conference and attempting to sketch what the future might hold for German-Irish cultural relations. The panel brought a wealth of personal experience to bear on the subject. Patricia Conlan, a lecturer in European Law at the University of Limerick and a former DAAD scholarship holder, based her contribution on extensive experience of German and Irish third level institutions gathered during her undergraduate and postgraduate years at University College Galway and her research for her Dr iur. at Tuebingen University. She emphasised the multifacetted nature of German culture with its many regional and generational varieties which render it difficult to make any general pronouncements on German culture. Hugh Ridley, Prof of German at University College Dublin, sounded a critical note highlighting the pressures the subject of German is under at Irish third level institutions. Despite massive increases in student numbers the future of German is far from secure. Reinhard Schmitt-Supprian, Director of the Goethe Institute in Dublin, deplored the drastic spending cuts in recent years in the area of cultural relations which are making it well-nigh impossible for an increasing number of Goethe Institutes including his own to fulfil their functions particularly in the cultural sphere.

Denis Staunton, the Irish Times correspondent in Berlin and arguably the best-informed Irish journalist on German matters, described how he experienced a gradual 'loosening up' among young Germans. The annual Love Parades in Berlin point to a new Germany far removed from and unfettered by the proverbial German seriousness and the Nazi past. The final session also highlighted the massive changes which lie ahead as a result of the continuing process of European integration with the introduction of the Euro as a significant and symbolic event.

[In September 1999 the 2nd Limerick Conference in Irish-German Studies was organized by Centre for Irish-German Studies and the Centre for European Studies at the University of Limerick in co-operation with the DAAD. The topics of the conference included historical, economic, political, social and cultural developments in both countries. A selection of the excellent papers presented at the Conference have been published in Gisela Holfter, Joachim Lerchenmueller, Edward Moxon-Browne (eds.): Yearbook of the Centre for Irish-German Studies 1999/2000. WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier 2000, ISBN 3-88476-408-X, ISSN 1393-8061, DM 42 (im Buchhandel), IRP 15 (incl P&P, Direktbezug beim Centre for Irish-German Studies, LCS Dept., University of Limerick, Limerick, Irland. Email: "joachim.lerchenmueller@ul.ie")]

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