

# **“50 years later, I still think joining the EU was a mistake,” says Irexit spokesman**

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*This article has been co-published with our affiliated organisation, Brexit Facts4EU.Org.*

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## **It's easy to forget the Irish twice voted against EU treaties and were told to vote again**

**CIBUK.Org and Facts4EU.Org are pleased to present a guest article from the Republic of Ireland**

Below we publish the thoughts of a well-informed Irishman on his own country's journey in its relationship with the European Union. He covers many important issues which have resonance for British people in the light of Brexit.

**Emeritus Professor Anthony Coughlan** is Spokesman for 'The National Platform EU Research and Information Centre', Dublin. The organisation advocates a Europe of independent, democratic, cooperating nation states.



With Europhile politicians such as Leo Varadkar in charge in the Republic of Ireland, it's easy to forget that the Irish people voted to reject two key EU treaties in two referenda.

As they 'voted the wrong way' they were of course made to vote again until they got the decision right. Given this background, the perspective of a very experienced Irish eurosceptic should be of interest.

Photo: Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar

We hope readers enjoy Professor Coughlan's excellent article as much as we did on reading it.

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## **'A monumental betrayal of democracy by Ireland's political Establishment'**

**By Anthony Coughlan**

In the 1972 Accession referendum that brought us into the EEC, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, the Labour Party and the two recently divided Sinn Fein parties urged a No vote. But when it came to the poll it looked as if most voters said to themselves that if Fianna Fail and Fine Gael – traditional

political opponents – recommended joining, it must be a good thing. The huge Yes vote was equivalent to the combined vote of the State's two biggest parties.

### **That was then – this is now**

Would people have voted the same way if they could have seen how the EEC/EC/EU has developed in the half century since? I would myself, but it is idle to speculate. What matters is where we are now and what the future holds.

What has happened in between has been a monumental betrayal of democracy by Ireland's political Establishment. Whether one regards joining the EEC as a mistake or not, membership was genuinely endorsed by Irish voters in 1973.

### **The Irish people rejected the Nice and Lisbon Treaties but were ignored**

But when voters rejected the Nice Treaty in 2001 and the Lisbon Treaty in 2008 two things had changed: the Irish public showed clearly they were concerned at the direction of travel, but our Establishment was no longer willing to turn back, **no matter what the people wanted.**

The consequences of the rejection of the People's instincts – and, more importantly, their instructions – have been profound. One was joining the single currency, which led to the reckless credit expansion by the Irish banks and the 2009 financial crisis.

**The other has been the constitutional revolution by stealth that has made us citizens of a Federal European Union, effectively a United States of Europe, without most of us realising it or thinking through its implications.**



Photo credit: The National Platform – [click to enlarge](#)

## The ‘Federation of Europe’

The 1950 Schuman Declaration, which the EU celebrates each year on May 9th, Europe Day, described the first supranational treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community as *“a first step in the federation of Europe”*. A Federation is a State and to advance that goal has been the purpose of the eight EU-related referendums we have had since 1973. Do people remember the monstrous assault on national democracy across Europe which brought the EU Constitution, that is now part of our Constitution, into being?

In 2004 there was the “Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe”, whose first article stated: *“This Constitution establishes the European Union”* – clearly a constitutionally different EU from what was called the EU previously. When the French and Dutch peoples rejected this in referendums, it was 99% repackaged three years later as the Lisbon Treaty. Only Ireland was allowed a referendum on that. And when we voted to reject it in 2008 **we were made to vote again in 2009 on exactly the same treaty to get a different result.**

## The transfer of powers to the EU

The EU Constitution implemented by the Lisbon Treaty abolished the European Community that had been the repository of supranational powers up to then. It transferred those powers

to the new European Union which Lisbon established, giving it legal personality for the first time. It gave this new EU powers over foreign and security policy, and crime and justice. It gave it the power to decide our human rights. It put EU law-making substantially on a population basis to the benefit of the big States. And it made us all real citizens of the post-Lisbon EU so that we all now have two citizenships, with State sovereignty divided between the supranational Federal and the National/Regional level, just as in such classical Federal States as the USA and Germany.

One can only be a citizen of a State and all States consist of their citizens. The prime civic duty of each of us, with our two citizenships, is to obey EU law and national law. In any conflict between the two, European law has primacy.

## **Where are we now, post-Brexit?**

European Union membership has brought benefits of course, just as our membership of the British Union did, but on any objective assessment the costs now outweigh the benefits. We are now **net contributors** to, rather than beneficiaries from, the EU Budget.

**Today Ireland does more of its foreign trade with North America and the UK than it does with the continental EU. We really are closer to Boston than Berlin.**

## **The policy trajectory**

Outside the EU we would get back the power to make our own laws, regain our own currency and with it control of either our rate of interest or our exchange rate. We would get back our valuable sea fisheries and our foreign policy independence.

What of Partition? Can it ever be in Britain's security interest – or indeed England's – to facilitate a United Ireland as a member State of a European Federation dominated by Franco-Germany? I doubt it. If that is so, then anyone who aspires to a reunified Ireland should logically be advocating Irexit – not least as a meaningful gesture to the “Britishness” of Northern Unionists.

We need to look more objectively at the post-Lisbon EU and its policy trajectory. That means looking at it more critically than is our wont.

**The author:** Anthony Coughlan is Associate Professor Emeritus in Social Policy at Trinity College Dublin

[NOTE: We inserted sub-headings into Professor Coughlan's article for ease of reading and also emboldened some of his key points for those readers who are short of time. Otherwise the text is unaltered.]

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