

The Irish myth of the euro fairy godmother is out of date

Former Irish ambassador Dr Ray Bassett explains how the country's Establishment is overrun with a pro-EU groupthink. The Irish people have been subject to unremitting pro-EU propaganda for decades, but the myth that the country's prosperity depends on EU membership is seriously out of date.

Irish politicians and officials are afflicted by a pro-EU groupthink which determines the country's passive relationship with the EU.

Perhaps there are underlying sociological reasons for this. Irish society is often more comfortable with an echo chamber rather than serious debate. Irish mainstream media, especially television, is very conservative and risk averse.

The bulk of publications on the EU in Ireland are unashamedly propagandist. They concentrate on the positive side of membership of the EU and shy clear of any of the negatives. Much of this material is actually funded by the EU itself, in a remarkably egotistical exercise. These propaganda pieces, when not published by the EU itself, are often written by people who have a vested and selfish interest in promoting the objectives of the Brussels establishment. Yet they rarely openly declare that they have benefited personally from taking this line. Hence, it is rare in Ireland to ask fundamental questions on Europe – despite the fact that many of the issues and fears which gave rise to Brexit in the UK are also relevant to Ireland.

Scepticism of the EU is still regarded by official Ireland as

almost traitorous. There is a tendency to paint those who seek to preserve Ireland's sovereignty and its place in the world as a separate, independent nation, as people trying to return the country to the old days of British domination. It is a perverse phenomenon and unworthy of those sheltering behind it. It is often used to avoid reasoned argument and discussion.

It is indeed paradoxical that those who most loudly proclaim their liberal credentials seem to be super neuralgic in this regard. When I began writing for the Sunday Business Post, an approach was made to the then owner of the newspaper by some so-called pillars of society, including a former senior Irish government minister, politely requesting that I and a number of others whom they regarded as contrarians be dropped as columnists, because of our critical views of the EU. These people regard themselves as among the elite of society and regularly rant against censorship in other countries. But they fail to connect their own intolerance with what they criticise in others.

There are winds of change blowing throughout Europe. Those who foisted Treaty after Treaty on an unwilling population have a lot to answer for. They have been a much bigger long-term danger to constructive cooperation and friendship among the peoples of Europe than those who urged a different approach, based on respect for national sovereignty.

In fact, it has been the europhiles who have risked the future of European cooperation and have divided nations. They are ultimately responsible for Brexit and have shown no real respect for democracy. The tactics of the pro-EU side have always been the end justifies the means.

Ireland is therefore in a huge quandary. The ruling elite and much of the population have been subject to unremitting pro-EU propaganda for decades, coupled with a false nationalism, and find the present situation hard to comprehend.

There are some well-meaning people in Ireland, who share much of my criticism of the EU, but believe that it should be reformed, rather than contemplate a more drastic solution, an Irexit. However, I believe that this is naïve. The institutions of the EU have been designed to resist any fundamental reversal of the seepage of powers away from the democratically elected national Parliaments to a centralised Brussels.

The advocates of reform are unable to explain how any meaningful change can be actually achieved while the most powerful body inside the EU, the unelected Commission, retains an effective monopoly on the initiation of new legislation. Brussels and the national capitals are packed with individuals and organisations that have everything to lose from a dismantling of the current arrangements and will, in their own self-interests, resist change. The odds, unfortunately, do not favour a reformist approach.

There is still a widespread perception in Ireland and the UK that the EU continues to pay over large sums of money to the Irish exchequer, and that the country's standard of living is dependent on receiving Brussels' largesse. This image is bolstered by the mainstream media. Few people know the true picture, and the Irish Government is strangely coy about revealing figures in case it dents the popularity of the EU in Ireland, particularly with the ongoing Brexit process. But the myth of the euro fairy godmother is out of date.

In short, a fundamental change of direction by Ireland is needed – meaning an Irexit.

This article is taken from Dr Bassett's recent book Ireland and the EU Post Brexit, which can be purchased direct from the distributor here.